

PARENTAL CHOICE OF SCHOOL

Brian Henderson

PhD  
University of Edinburgh  
1990



I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by  
myself and that the work it contains is entirely my own



### Acknowledgements

While the title page carries the statement that this thesis is the work only of the author, this is, of course, at best only a half truth. During the course of this research, I have been aided by many people, academic, professional, relative and friend. Although the ultimate responsibility for this thesis is mine, each can share at least some of the credit - for the good bits at least.

Thanks are due to my supervisors, Mike Adler and David Nelson, to Scott Kerr for initial guidance and latterly, to Jack Tweedie and Allison Petch. Many officials in Lothian and Strathclyde Regional Councils offered help and advice, as did their colleagues, the Headteachers of all nine schools involved in the research. I remain grateful to 200 parents in Greenock and Edinburgh who not only gave up their time, but also shared with me many of their experiences.

I would also like to thank both my own parents and John and Evelyn Reid, who contributed help and support in many ways. Finally, I would like to thank Sheila, although in truth she would rather not appear in public to take such a bow. Tough.

## **Abstract**

The Education (Scotland) Act 1981 extended to parents the right to choose a school for their child, subject to certain exclusions and restraints. This thesis examines such parents' decisions from the perspective of Expectancy Theory.

Three linked projects were carried out in Greenock and Edinburgh between 1982 and 1984. The first of these was a pilot study, which, although limited in scope and scale, clearly established the salience of the issue to parents. The second study was conducted by means of in-depth interviews with 45 parents within the catchment area of Ainslie Park High School in Edinburgh. For the third study, 110 parents from this, and an adjacent area, were studied using a mailed questionnaire. The three studies, in combination, addressed the question of how, and why, parents were exercising their new right.

Parental choice as envisaged by the Conservative government embodied certain assumptions, principal among these being that parents' decisions would be informed and of sufficiently high quality to guide policy making at local level. The research carried out in the three studies casts considerable doubt on such assumptions.

While parents' decisions could be modelled successfully using Expectancy Theory, its use was nevertheless shown to leave unanswered certain key issues within the process of decision making. The final model proposed by this thesis attempts to both model and describe the process by which parents come to consider change, assess alternatives and subsequently make their decisions. It does so using a synthesis of previously uncombined theoretical perspectives.

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
Introduction	
Chapter 1 : Parental Choice : History and Implementation	1
Chapter 2 : Decision Making	25
Chapter 3 : A Model of Parental Choice	56
Chapter 4 : Overview of the Research and Methodology	80
Chapter 5 : The Pilot Study	123
Chapter 6 : Evidence from the Second Study	140
Chapter 7 : Evidence from the Third Study	191
Chapter 8 : Towards an Explanation of Parental Choice	243
Chapter 9 : The Not So Hidden Agenda of Parental Choice	276
Bibliography	290
Appendix 1 : The Brochures	298
Appendix 2 : The Second Study Questionnaire	301

## Introduction and Overview

This thesis sets out to explore one area of social policy, namely, the right of parents to choose a school for their child. Such rights were extended to parents in England under the terms of the Education Act (1980), and to those in Scotland one year later under Section 28 of the Education (Scotland) Act (1981). The right to choose a school is founded in a number of assumptions both of political philosophy and the nature of decision making. The aim of this research is to examine how parents come to exercise their rights and how, and why, they make the choices they do. The findings will thus seek to inform the debate about the role of lay participation in educational policy making.

Since the central concern of the research is decision making, it is appropriate that the theories and techniques used will be those of psychology. Such an approach offers the best opportunity to understand parents' perceptions of educational provision and their subsequent decisions to either accept the default school or to request another.

This thesis will describe three interlinked projects undertaken between 1982 and 1984 in Greenock and Edinburgh. During this time the views of around 200 parents were sought, either by means of face to face interview or by mailed questionnaire, and thus a substantial body of information was available from which to make observations on the key question at issue, namely : how, and why do parents choose schools.

Prior to the commencement of this research, only one small investigation into parental choice had been undertaken. (Elliot et al, 1981.) Subsequently, however, three independent projects sought to study the issue. These were conducted by researchers from the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, and the National Foundation for Educational Research. The conclusions of the present research will draw on these studies for corroboration.

To set the research in context, it is important to review the development of the post-war Scottish educational system and the parallel movement towards lay participation in policy issues. Chapter 1 will examine these issues in depth before reviewing the legislation and subsequent impact of parental choice on Scottish education.

Similarly, the psychological context of the research needs to be firmly established. Chapter 2 will examine the possible value of several theoretical explanations with a view to establishing a rationale for the use, throughout the research, of the Expectancy Theory of decision making. A critical review of Expectancy Theory will pave the way for the proposition of an experimental model in Chapter 3.

The exposition of the research methodology covering both theoretical and practical issues will form the introduction to the three experimental chapters. The first will describe a small pilot study undertaken in Greenock in 1982, whose aim was to establish the salience of the issue of parental choice and to inform and guide the subsequent main studies undertaken in Edinburgh in 1984.

In discussion of the experimental data it will become clear that a new model of parental choice is required. The penultimate chapter will expound this model in depth, the final chapter assesses the consequences of the research for perceptions of the parental choice decision.

## CHAPTER 1

### Parental Choice : History and Implementation

The purpose of this research is to examine the decisions made by parents under rights granted to them by Section 28 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1981. As a prelude to examining the decisions themselves, however, it is necessary to review the relevant legislation, in order to set the choices in context. In order to fully understand the parental choice provisions of the Education (Scotland) Act 1981 it is also important to first offer a brief review of the general development of education in Scotland after 1945, as this had a substantial bearing on the subsequent legislation.

### The Post-War Structure of Scottish Secondary Education

In the immediate post-war period, the Scottish Education Department was faced with the problem of how best to structure Scottish secondary education. Despite a recommendation from the Advisory Council on Education, they chose not to implement the "omnibus" school, which was essentially analogous to the "comprehensive" finally adopted from 1966. Instead, they recommended a bi-partite system, feeling that the distinct needs of academic and non-academic pupils would best be served in separate schools. Thus children were selected at 12 to attend either junior or senior secondary schools, although not always named as such. Selection was increasingly by intelligence testing, (Gray, McPherson and Raafe, 1983), and this system worked relatively smoothly, there being few disputes.

Legislation was therefore never required to set a framework for arbitration.

In cities, the bi-partite system was coupled to the idea of local schools, and thus a discrete group of schools served each area. Pupils could thus be allocated to one of two schools, the allocation decision being made by academic selection. In rural areas of the highlands and borders only one school - close to the "omnibus" model - generally operated given the constraints of sparse population and geographical factors. Thus the idea of "catchment areas" had existed in a limited form prior to 1966. (Primary education had, for the most part, always been so organised).

The fullest expression of the catchment area system came with the comprehensivisation of Scottish education in the wake of SED circular 600/1966 (the Scottish equivalent of DES Circular 10/65 in England) recommending that all Scottish schools should be reorganised along comprehensive lines. Implementation of this recommendation was total in Scotland, few councils being politically unwilling and there being little resistance from Directors. (Adler and Petch, 1986). This situation was in stark contrast to England where comprehensivisation was never totally accepted, and, as will be described later, this led almost directly to the development of ideas of parental choice.

Thus the structure of Scottish education following local government reorganisation (begun in 1975) was as follows. Schools were directly controlled by the Regional and Island authorities ultimately responsible to the Secretary of State for Scotland through the Scottish Education



Department. Primary schools, to which children were allocated by geographical location took children between the ages of 5 and 12. At 12, children progressed to their local comprehensive school, either by virtue of their home address, or by their primary school attended (depending on Region). Children would remain at secondary school until the age of 16.

While non-denominational comprehensives constitute the largest single type of school in Scotland, Local Authorities are also responsible for maintaining a variety of other establishments. The Catholic minority is served by a parallel denominational system. Similarly, children with particular needs or problems are catered for in specialist schools.

Glasgow and Edinburgh have a strong private sector, some 19% of all pupils in the latter being so educated. While the Conservative government's Assisted Places scheme to some extent widened access to fee paying schools, the two systems, state and private are best seen as entirely separate.

The Scottish secondary system as it existed prior to 1981 was thus best described as "local and vertical".

#### "Parental Choice" in Scotland before 1981

Even prior to the 1981 Act, the option of formalised choice had existed for those with the means to afford it through the private education

sector. Although access has been to an extent widened by the Assisted Places Scheme, it still remained the province of the minority and, until recently, was the only alternative within the taught system - the 1944 Education Act (1945 Education Scotland Act) gave parents the right to educate their children at home if they could provide the necessary skill and expertise.

The Education Act of 1944 in England and its 1945 equivalent in Scotland had nothing to say on the subject of parental choice. In a variety of court cases, parents on both sides of the border tried to suggest that Section 76 (28 in Scotland) viz :

*"(Education Authorities are) to have regard to the general principle that, so far as is compatible with the provision of suitable instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents"*

implied that the Education Authority had a duty to accede to their requests. No court ever accepted this interpretation (Himsworth, 1980) - Lord Denning ruled that authorities were at liberty to have regard to other considerations as well, (Watt vs Kesteven C.C., 1955), if they saw fit, and his interpretation was generally held to be correct.

Adler and Petch (1986) further contend that any suggestion that the 1944 Act granted parents "rights" to education would be alien to the spirit of both the legislation and the times.

Although parents had been given no "rights" to have their children educated at the school of their choice, all Scottish Authorities accepted that there would be anomalies and disputes and thus had established guidelines on exceptional admission to schools. These worked well, and prior to 1977 most of these requests were granted.

In Scotland at least there was little dissatisfaction with this policy, since those parents unhappy at the allocated school could generally get what they wanted by an exceptional admission. While some authorities' practices were more or less strict, there was no evidence of popular pressure to force government to consider legislation to change the practice of exceptional admission. There was thus no desire for change since, for the most part, it would have been entirely unnecessary. (University of Glasgow, 1986).

#### Lothian Region and the End of Consensus

As described, this consensual attitude to exceptional admissions prevailed in Scotland up to the end of the 1970s. However, faced with former senior secondaries gaining pupils heavily at the expense of neighbouring former junior secondaries, Lothian Region decided to act to protect these schools, and, by extension, the catchment area system in Edinburgh. In effect, they so tightened their exceptional admissions procedures as to make it very difficult for parents' wishes to be met, generally only when a sibling had attended the desired school.

While parents had a right of appeal to the authority, if this was refused they were faced with little alternative but to keep their children away from school and wait for the Region to institute attendance order procedures against them in the hope that, should the case come to court, the Sheriff would find in their favour, most notably in 1979 when a number of parents withdrew their children from school in protest at being refused access to Leith Academy. A test case found in favour of the parents and all ten concerned were subsequently admitted to their chosen school. Inevitably, this led to a large amount of (mostly) unfavourable publicity for the Region and this tended to obscure the underlying issues.

The nature of Edinburgh and its schools had made such a confrontation inevitable. Always the most class and status conscious of cities, it was (and is) important in certain circles to have attended the "right" school. While this would generally refer to private schools, there was, nevertheless, some form of "pecking order" among supposedly equal state schools. Thus the Royal High School, a former fee paying boys' school of high status and reputation, lately brought into the state system, was filled well beyond its planned capacity (even allowing for the existence of huts and other temporary structures) while several of its neighbours were operating far below complement. For Lothian Region, the problem was exacerbated by the illiterate and vocal nature of the parents it sought to exclude from popular schools, and it was thus inevitable that a strong lobby would reach Mr Alex Fletcher, Minister of State for Education in the Conservative government (elected in May 1979), and, by coincidence, a local M.P.

Faced with this problem, Mr Fletcher had little political alternative but to exercise his powers and he "called in" the Lothian transfer arrangements in August 1980. Lothian produced an alternative plan which did not meet with the approval of the Minister, and he directed it to be revised to allow essentially free access to schools with places. Although the Region attempted to reverse this decision in Parliament, they failed, and the revised scheme became "policy" for session 1981-1982. (Tweedie, 1986).

Thus although parents in Scotland had no "rights" enacted by legislation, it was clear that Mr Fletcher had ensured that their wishes would be acceded to in most, if not all, cases. However, despite the apparent strength of this position, the Conservative government proceeded towards formalisation through legislation. Before discussing this in detail, it is important to review the political movement towards parental choice, a specifically English development, but one which had considerable bearing on the eventual shape of legislation in Scotland.

#### Political Pressure in England

It will be remembered that the position of parents in law in England and Wales was identical to that in Scotland - they had no right to choose a school for their child and they had no right of appeal should they disagree with a local authority decision. The disparate nature of the English educational system - the coexistence of comprehensives and

grammar schools along with a variety of aided and maintained schools, the plethora of examination bodies and the existence of the "governors" system - was reflected in the lack of a consensus on exceptional admissions in areas where selection did not operate (and between same type schools where it did). (Stillman and Maychell, 1986). By the middle of the 1970s, more and more disputes had arisen (around 1000 per annum) but the DES was unwilling to interfere, considering that school choice was a local matter. Tweedie (1986) notes that although disputes occasionally reached the Minister, there was little move towards any legislation or indeed policy change, and summarises the situation viz :

*.....parental choice of state school was primarily a local issue prior to 1974. There were many disputes between LEAs and parents but almost all were resolved at a local level. The Secretary of State and the DES intervened in only a few extreme cases. Finally, parental choice policy was not seen as an issue for national policy makers, but one issue to be resolved at local level. The sole exception was a short lived Labour proposal in 1969 that generated little support, even from parents' associations.*

(n.b. The Labour move was to institute independent appeals to tribunals to decide disputes between parents and LEAs. A measure some way short of full parental choice, it fell with the general election of 1970.)

Within the Conservative party, in opposition after the defeat in the October 1974 election, a number of backbench MPs instituted a debate on education policy, which was to run throughout the life of the Parliament. With the appointment of Mr St John Stevas from among their number as Education Spokesman the debate was formalised by the appointment of

several committees charged with developing policy initiatives. (Tweedle 1986).

The Labour government, in making clear statements favouring compulsory comprehensivisation, had prompted public concern over standards, both transitional and longer term. More widely the "Black Paper on Education" (IEA 1974) had made attacks on both standards and discipline. Against the backdrop of these concerns, the Conservatives focussed on parental choice as a means of both securing an increase in standards and also some measure of political advantage. (Tweedle 1986).

There were, however, differences within the party over how this could best be achieved. Mr Rhodes Boyson led a group of MPs who followed Hayek and Friedman in advocating vouchers. (Seldon, 1986).

#### Vouchers In Education

Reviewing this topic, Maynard (1975) noted eight distinct variants on the idea of educational vouchers, although only two have achieved prominence, if not acceptance. Friedman (1955) first advocated that parents be given vouchers to "spend" on education. His view, later fully developed by IEA economists and educationalists (Seldon, 1986) proposed that an amount equivalent to the full or substantial part cost of a state school place be given to each parent to purchase education at any educational establishment of their choice. In the case of private schools, any amount of top up would be permitted. Maynard (1975) also notes that no

restriction would be placed on school admission policies and thus parental will could still be overruled by selection on class or educational grounds.

An alternative view is offered by Jencks (1970). The only widespread implementation of a voucher idea followed the GI Bill in USA (Baldwin, 1983). Returning servicemen were given credits to complete their education at whichever level and in whichever way they chose. Jencks' voucher represented a development of this liberal idea. (Maynard 1975) His voucher represented the full average cost of state education but, subject to means test, may be *supplemented* by the authority for poorer parents. Further top up by parents would not be permitted.

Bosanquet (1983) noted that, while both labelled "vouchers", their implications for parents were rather different. Friedman's scheme clearly favoured well-off parents who would gain from an end to what was essentially double taxation. Jencks' however would cause an averaging out of all spending, eroding any advantage to be gained by high income families. Although of course they would pay less, equally they may receive a *different* education from that available in a free market. Indeed, Jencks' scheme owes little to free market economics at all. (Bosanquet 1983).

Only two implementations of vouchers for parental choice have been undertaken, one at Alum Rock in California, the other by Kent CC in England. The former was variously judged as a success (Bosanquet 1983) or as a failure (Seldon, 1986). Certainly, schools were encouraged to seriously question their provision of subject areas and, if necessary, diversify. However, opposition from teaching unions insulated the schools from market



forces and thus made the situation artificial (Seldon 1986). Vouchers were replaced by open enrolment in 1976. (Kent CC, 1978)

The Kent CC experiment was similarly inconclusive. (Bosanquet, 1983). Faced with problems from education professionals, provisioning of services and burgeoning costs, the experiment was abandoned initially in favour of limited open enrolment. (Kent 1978). Stillman and Maychell (1986) note that "it is difficult to imagine a more expensive way of managing schools" (p17).

Bosanquet (1983) contends that vouchers are unlikely to be adopted as policy even by a Conservative government and there is clear evidence from the Education Reform Bill (1987) that this continues to be the case.

#### The 1974-1979 Parliament

The foundation for the Conservative sponsored parental choice measures of 1975-1979 was laid by Boyson and Cox (IEA, 1970). They proposed that there was a clear link between parental involvement in education and standards. Given choice, parents would opt for good schools, and away from bad. This simplistic assertion has driven much of the thinking on parental choice since 1970. (see below).

The policy reviews within the Conservative party favoured non-voucher parental choice, first formalised by the Education (Parents' Charter) Bill in April 1975. Introduced by Mr Shelton (C. Streatham) the Bill proposed that LEAs should give greater regard to parental wishes, set up appeal

committees and publish specific educational information. Although couched in terms of raising standards, neither the Bill itself nor Mr Shelton's contribution to the debate made any proposal as to how this was to be attained. Mr St John Stevas, Shadow Secretary of State for Education chose to develop a rights based approach in his contribution :

*"This right is fundamental to human nature.....it is essential to people's self respect"*

Mr Armstrong, Under Secretary, reiterated the government's commitment to comprehensive education as the best means of securing a varied choice for parents.

While the Education Bill (1976) contained no parental choice provisions, the Conservative opposition moved several amendments reiterating a number of proposals previously contained in Mr Shelton's Bill. Tweedie (1986) contends that the Conservatives were more intent on stalling government moves on comprehensivisation. However, this did not prevent lively debate on standards, prompted by Dr Hampson who clearly delineated the "market model" previously proposed by Boyson and Cox (op cit) as a means of improving standards. (Mr Boyson paradoxically had moved an amendment calling for the introduction of vouchers). He further outlined a proposal to force comprehensive schools to offer differing curricula thus producing market diversity. This, if viewed in isolation, was a radical proposal. However, his agenda became clear in further proposing that final acceptance of pupils at each school would be at the discretion of

headteachers, on the basis of interview and primary school records - "selection" by another name. All of the Conservative amendments were defeated.

While this was the final Conservative sponsored move, the Labour Education Bill of 1978 contained a proposal to force LEAs to accede to parents' wishes except where a school would become under or over-subscribed. Appeal to the Secretary of State was offered as a means of arbitration in cases of dispute. The motives for the Labour Bill were complex, partly a reaction to the increase in disputes over appeals, partly political opportunism but mostly an attempt to protect neighbourhood schools in the face of falling school rolls, by introducing planned admission limits. The Conservatives were quick to point out that parental choice and planned admission limits were mutually exclusive. (Tweedie, 1986). Although the Bill fell with the May 1979 election, paradoxically it formed the basis of the Bill introduced by the new Conservative government, destined in large part to become the Education Act 1980.

#### The Education Act 1980

Only brief mention need be made of the (English) Education Act 1980. The incoming Conservative government had repealed the "comprehensivisation" clauses of Labour's 1976 Act in the first year of office, leaving parental choice one more year for implementation. Rather than institute a full policy review, the Conservatives took the basis of Labour's 1978 proposals, amending provisions on admissions limits and strengthening parents' rights of appeal to an independent tribunal. Apart from a requirement to publish

examination results among other information, the Act differed little from the scope of Labour provisions which caused LEAs to have regard to the wishes of parents wherever possible. (Tweedle 1986).

#### The Education (Scotland) Act 1981

Compared to political movements in England, parental choice in a Scottish context had little precedent prior to 1978. Two Conservative party papers published in 1978 attempted to develop an agenda for parental choice. The second of these, by Mr Alex Fletcher (later Minister of State) and Mr John MacKay, entitled "Scottish Education - Regaining a Lost Reputation" proposed a clear model of choice in fact little different from the Labour measure shortly to be proposed for England and Wales in allowing local authorities to take into consideration school capacities and the "neighbourhood" element, obviously devices which would allow councils to protect unpopular schools. There does not appear to have been any question of the authors subscribing to the "market model" favoured by their English counterparts. (University of Glasgow, 1986). In this document, and in early statements following his appointment as Minister of State, Mr Fletcher indicated that parental choice should be allied to the development of particular subjects within schools, thus giving parents a choice of specialisation and ethos thus :

*"If parents are to have a real choice, it will also be important that schools themselves should develop their own individual identity and ethos - and perhaps their own traditions and strengths in particular areas of the curriculum" (Speech to SPTC, 10/79).*

In March 1980 the SED issued a consultative paper "Admission to School - A Charter for Parents". The document proposed parental choice along the lines of that about to be enacted in England and Wales. Although little time was given for submissions, some 15 organisations including local authorities (COSLA), teachers' and parents' organisations, the Scottish Consumer Council and the Church of Scotland produced detailed responses to the proposals. (University of Glasgow, 1986). Most were (severely) critical of the consultative paper - the teachers' unions were concerned that "ghetto schools" would result and that staff morale would suffer, COSLA were worried that the local authorities' ability to manage resources would be compromised and that, in any case, the legislation was unnecessary. Of the submissions, only the parents' organisations and the Scottish Consumer Council were broadly in favour, and indeed the latter felt that several of the provisions did not go far enough.

In the event, only one substantive change was made before the introduction of the Education (Scotland) Bill - that of a provision strengthening the appeals procedure proposed by the SCC. At this stage COSLA adopted the attitude that, since they could do little to prevent it, they should cooperate and seek to minimise what they saw as the "damage". (University of Glasgow, 1986). This cooperation was ended, however, when the government moved an important amendment at the third reading stage - well beyond the point where lobbying would be possible. The move prevented local authorities setting admission limits on schools. The government's fear, (echoing that expressed by the SCC), was that local authorities would set unrealistic admission limits through the device of restricting class

sizes for popular schools, and thus seek to restrict entry in this way to protect catchment areas and unpopular schools.

Thus, on 26th October 1981, the Education (Scotland) Act 1981 received the Royal Assent - its provisions to take effect from March 1982, but in reality, immediately. Each authority was required to implement a plan for transfer at all stages and each did so - the transition was smooth and no problems were apparent. Although the Act was clear, the SED also issued some 20 pages of clarifying guidelines to Local Authorities. (SED, 1981).

#### Parental Choice Provisions of the Act

It is worthwhile at this stage, and for reference, to quote the relevant sections of the Act in full.

*28A - (1) Where the parent of a child makes a written request to an education authority to place his child in the school specified in the request, being a school under their management, it shall be the duty of the authority, subject to subsections (2) and (3) below, to place the child accordingly. Such a request so made is referred to in this Act as a "placing request" and the school specified in it as the "specified school". (2) Where a placing request relates to two or more schools under the management of the education authority to whom it was made, the duty imposed by subsection (1) above shall apply in relation to the first mentioned school, which shall be treated for the purposes of this Act as the specified school. (3) The duty imposed by subsection (1) above does not apply -*

*(a) If placing the child in the specified school would :*

- (i) make it necessary for the authority to take an additional teacher into employment*
- (ii) give rise to significant expenditure on extending or otherwise altering the accommodation or facilities provided in connection with the school; or*
- (iii) be seriously detrimental to the continuity of the child's education; or*

*(iv) be likely to be seriously detrimental to order and discipline in the school or the educational well being of the pupils there.*

*(b) If the education normally provided at the specified school is not suited to the age, ability or aptitude of the child;*

*(c) If the education authority has already required the child to discontinue his attendance at the specified school;*

*(d) If, where the specified school is a special school, the child does not have the special educational needs requiring the education or special facilities normally provided at that school;*

*(e) If the specified school is a single sex school (within the meaning given to that expression by Section 26 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975) and the child is not of the sex admitted or taken (under that section) to be admitted to the school, but an education authority may place a child in the specified school notwithstanding paragraphs (a) to (e) above.*

The main effect of the provisions of the Act was to shift the balance of power of the decision from the Local Authority to the parent. It was now much more difficult for a Local Authority to refuse a request. The exclusions under the Act were not strong - In times of falling school rolls and given the existence of compulsory transfer of teachers, it is difficult, for example, to see how a refusal under the terms of Section 28(A) 3(a)(I and II)) (relating to the need to employ additional teachers or spend on facilities) would be admissible.

Another problem not envisaged by the legislators but encountered by at least one authority, (Central Region), was parents using parental choice provisions to remove children from special schools to return them to the mainstream. It will be remembered that the Act only forbids movement in the opposite direction. Conceivably, a refusal could have been made under the terms of "education ... not suitable to the ... abilities of the child",



but the authority chose not to do this - much to the chagrin of teachers faced with the problem at the intended school. (Personal communication by staff involved).

While the exclusions listed in the Act are not stringent, one aspect of the Act nevertheless has almost the force of a formal exclusion. If a parent should make a placing request, the Local Authority has no obligation to provide transport or pay its cost, even in cases where the child would normally have qualified for a free "pass". Clearly designed to prevent additional expenditure, this regulation, however, has thrown up a number of anomalies. For example, in one rural area of Strathclyde, all children would normally qualify for a "pass". Those parents requesting an alternative school in the local town were denied these, although the fare to each school was, in fact, identical, and it was possible to travel on the same bus service to either school (see Chapter 5.) It is difficult to reconcile this issue on moral grounds given the stated aim of the legislation (in Mr Fletcher's consultative paper) of opening avenues to "better" schools for poorer parents. (SED, 1980).

Given the duties of the authority to inform parents of their rights (which will be discussed more fully in the next section), a typical chronology of the parental choice procedure would be as follows :

*1. December - parents receive a letter from their local authority informing them that their child has been allocated to school X and reminding them that they have the right to choose an alternative school. A form may be provided. Also, the local authority should supply a copy of the relevant brochure and remind parents that they may ask for brochures pertaining to other schools.*



2. January - Typically the closing date for placing requests.
3. February/March - Requests dealt with by the authority.
4. April - Parents must be informed of the decision of the authority and informed of their right to appeal should they disagree.
5. April onwards - Appeals procedure.

(Lothian Regional Arrangements, 1983-84. Those surveyed by University of Glasgow, 1986, are essentially similar).

#### Information Provisions of the Act

The Act imposes on Local Authorities the duty to make known to parents both their rights and certain items of information. For reference, the relevant sections are as follows :

28B - (1) Every education authority shall -

(a) publish or otherwise make available information as to -

(i) their arrangements for the placing of children in schools under their management;

(ii) such matters as may be prescribed by regulations;

(iii) such other matters as the authority consider necessary or expedient for the purposes of their functions under this Act.

(b) where a child falls, in accordance with those arrangements, to be placed in a school under their management -

(i) in a case where the authority propose to place the child in a particular school, inform his parent of the school; or

(ii) in every case, subject to subsection (4) below, inform the parent of the general effect of section 28A (1) and (2) of this Act and of his right to make a placing request;

*(c) In making arrangements for the performance of their functions under this Act, formulate guidelines to be followed by them as respects placing in schools generally, or, if they think it necessary, in any particular school in the event of there being more placing requests made in respect of certain schools or, as the case may be, that school, or in respect of any stage or stages of school education provided there are places available;*

*(d) on a request to that effect made to them at any time by a parent of a child, supply the parent with any prescribed or determined information about any school under their management;*

*In paragraph (d) above, "prescribed or determined information" means information prescribed or determined under subsection 3(c) below.*

*(2) An education authority shall, in performance of the duties imposed on them by subsection (1) above, comply with any regulations made under subsection (3) below.*

*(3) The Secretary of State may by regulation prescribe or make provision for the determining of -*

*(a) the procedures in accordance with which education authorities are to perform the duties imposed upon them by subsection (1) above and when they are to do so;*

*(b) how education authorities are to go about publishing or otherwise making available information under subsection (1) above or informing parents under that subsection;*

*(c) the kind of information which is to be so published or which is to comprise the information so made available or supplied to parents.*

*(4) The duty imposed by subsection (1)(b)(ii) above arises only when the existence of the child and the fact that he fails to be placed in a school under their management are known to the authority.*

The sections are largely self explanatory, ensuring that parents were informed of their rights and given information relating to the procedure to be operated in relation to placing requests. The Act gives the Secretary of State the power to dictate the sorts of information to be made available and

In fact this was done in the regulations which were sent to local authorities. (SED Circular 1048) The majority of the demands are simple and non-controversial, relating largely to addresses, contacts, pastoral care, courses generally available and so on. Schools were also instructed to make a statement on their aims and policies, presumably to allow parents to choose or reject those which conformed or otherwise to their ideal. More controversially, however, later regulations stipulated that schools must publish examination results. This demand is not surprising given the aims of the legislation, but opinion was divided as to the merits of the move. The EIS, in their submission to the consultative paper expressed grave doubts over parents' abilities to comprehend fully the meaning of the results and noted that, in their opinion, school was about much more than exam results (University of Glasgow, 1986). They also pointed out that there were many ways in which the tables could be presented, so making comparisons impossible. This opposition notwithstanding, schools now have a duty to publish results, and Appendix 1 contains a brief examination of 13 Lothian Region school brochures.

#### Take up of Parental Choice

The data in this section relate to the period in general up to 1984/85 when the final part of the research was undertaken.

Prior to the implementation of the 1981 Act, the general feeling was that the measures would only affect the middle classes and take up would be limited. (See e.g. University of Glasgow, 1986; Tweedie, 1986). By session

1984/85, the number of placing requests relating to Scottish schools at all stages had reached 20,795 - hardly limited in scale. At transfer between primary and secondary schools some one in twelve of all children in schools were placed in a school other than their catchment area. (At primary entry the numbers were broadly similar).

Table 1.1 Placing Requests

Session	Primary	Secondary	Total
1982/83	5746	4710	10 456
1983/84	9702	7433	17 135
1984/85	11785	8762	20 547

(Source : SED Statistical Bulletin, May 1985)

It is clear from Table 1.1 that numbers of requests had doubled in the first three years of implementation (those covered by this research). By 1985, the figure of 20 547 represented only 2% of all school pupils indicating that choice was exercised by only a small minority of parents. (University of Glasgow, 1986). In 1983/84, at primary stage, only 50% of requests related to initial entry (i.e. P1), although this figure rose to over 60% for S1 admission requests. (SED, 1984). A year later, these proportions had risen to 55% and 68% respectively. If only those children entering P1 and S1 are considered, around 8% of movements were as a consequence of a placing request. (SED, 1985).

These national figures were of course depressed by the existence of areas where there is no viable choice - the Highlands, parts of Strathclyde and the Borders for example - and it is interesting to examine the figures for urban

areas. At S1, for example, Tayside Region as a whole reached 13.3% of children making requests, while in the Dundee division, this figure was no less than 19.8%. Similarly in Lothian, the overall figure of 11.8% masked an Edinburgh level of 20.5% (this had actually declined from the 1983/84 figure of 22.5%). Thus in certain areas, around one in five of all transfers were the subject of a placing request.

There is no evidence that parents of any one class or social group were predominant in making requests. (University of Glasgow, 1986; Adler and Petch, 1986). Both studies found that requests had been made by parents across the entire social class spectrum. Neither, in fact, found any means of differentiating among groups who made or did not make placing requests. (Adler and Petch, 1986, however, make the observation that while this is true overall, local patterns may exist).

A full analysis of placing requests in the study areas will form a part of Chapter 4.

By 1985, over 48000 placing requests (excluding underage admissions) had been made. (SED 1986) The philosophy of the legislation made certain assumptions about parental choice. Principal among these was that parental choice was an informed, rational reaction to concern about standards of education and that local policy could (and should) be made on the basis of parental choice. (Tweedie, 1986). In enacting legislation, the parliamentary process does not require that it be shown to be well founded, merely that it receives the assent of a majority of Members of Parliament. Part of the role of social policy research is to seek to inform the monitoring of

legislation and to attempt to assess its worth. In order to perform such a task for the Education (Scotland) Act 1981, it is clearly essential to examine the decisions made by parents.

The focus of the present research is thus to examine why parents choose to make such placing requests, to determine which factors motivate them in deciding which school to select among the possible range of choices, and ultimately to discover how best to model these decisions. The next chapter will, in reviewing the literature of decision making from a psychological perspective, develop a rationale for the research models employed.

## CHAPTER 2

### Decision Making

#### Overview

This research was derived from a linked award made by the Social Science Research Council in 1981 to Michael Adler and David Nelson. The terms of the grant award called for a continuation of work in the area of Expectancy Theory carried out by Dr Scott Kerr between 1977 and 1982. (Kerr 1982) In studying the individual choice decisions made by old people whether to apply for supplementary pensions Kerr proposed that a single stage model of choice was inappropriate. The present research was set up to attempt to examine the wider relevance of the sort of model proposed by Kerr. A number of study areas were investigated - among them the take up of other state benefits and the decision whether to consult a General Practitioner. The present study area, Parental Choice seemed to offer an area of particular topical interest coupled with a high face validity in terms of easy transfer of the bases of the model.

The necessity to adopt a specific paradigm, in this case expectancy theory, leaves the research open to criticism on the grounds that it does not address the topic using the best theory. The counter argument, that the research area, in this case parental choice, is merely the means to the end of replication is flawed in that it leaves many opportunities unexplored in

terms of advancing the understanding of the decision rather than merely the theory. The present research represents an attempt to take the middle ground. On one hand, it was attempted to discover whether Kerr's model was indeed transferable to another area of social policy for which it appeared to have a high face validity. On the other, this research was not seen merely as replication. Kerr had offered a means to an end. While using expectancy theory as a starting point, the research was committed to attempting to provide a psychological theory of parental choice which would best explain the phenomenon, if necessary at the expense of predictive "power". These comments notwithstanding, it must be accepted that the final decision represented a compromise between the competing demands of the funding on one hand and the optimal exploration of the topic on the other.

### Introduction

That there is no one best means to study parental choice is clearly evinced by the fact that this, and the three parallel projects briefly outlined in the Introduction, chose to take different approaches to the issue. The present research used the theories and techniques of psychology, which were appropriate here, since the main consideration of this particular study was the nature of the decision itself, not the effects of such decisions on the educational system, (the issue common to the other projects).

This chapter will therefore present an overview of a number of decision theories which in their turn influenced and shaped Expectancy Theory. The theory itself will be examined in some depth, and subsequently, a number of alternative strategies for decision making will be reviewed.



## Decision Theories

There is nothing mystical about the action of making a decision whether it be of great importance or of little consequence. Decisions can be straightforward or complex, and this need not be directly related to their importance, since often crucial decisions can be simple. People make decisions in a variety of ways and may, in reporting their actions, give accounts relying on factors apparently "trivial" and "irrational" to an observer. However, each decision is likely to be internally consistent and there are few occasions where a random choice of any level of importance is made.

An example of a complex decision can be found in the Bible. According to Genesis 22, Abraham was instructed by God to kill his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Clearly Abraham was faced with a choice. On the one hand he had the love for his son, on the other his love for, and duty and devotion towards God, and, it is likely, fear for his life should he fail to obey. Using some evaluative criterion or criteria he made the decision to sacrifice. He was, of course, unaware that God was merely "testing" his faith and thus he cannot have expected to be relieved as he was, and given a ram to sacrifice instead. Clearly not everyone would have arrived at the same decision - different people would have assessed the consequences of the two possible courses of action in different ways. Clearly the decision could have been "analysed" in terms of many different theoretical perspectives.

Mao Tsetung (1936) comments on the process of making a decision, offering a rigorous prescription for success thus :

***"A Commander's correct dispositions stem from his correct decisions, his correct decisions stem from his correct judgements, and his correct judgements stem from a thorough and necessary reconnaissance and from pondering on and piecing together the data of various kinds gathered through reconnaissance. He applies all possible and necessary methods of reconnaissance, and ponders on the information gathered about the enemy's situation, discarding the dross and selecting the essential, eliminating the false and retaining the true, proceeding from the one to the other and from the outside to the inside; then, he takes the conditions on his own side into account, and makes a study of both sides and their interrelations, thereby forming his judgements, making up his mind and working out his plans. Such is the complete process of knowing a situation which a military man goes through before he formulates a strategic plan, a campaign plan or a battle plan."***

Mao's prescription is in many ways the antithesis of the practice of Greek and Roman armies of consulting oracles but it is a matter for conjecture which, given the differing contexts, produced the more effective decisions.

Modern science has produced a vast array of behavioural theories to account for decision making, and in the next section the history of this analysis will be examined with brief reference to several modern theoretical standpoints.

#### Towards Modern Decision Theory

The roots of modern decision analysis lie within the philosophy of utilitarianism. Although more a prescription of behaviour than an attributing theory, utilitarianism sought to explain why a particular course of action should be adopted given the existence of a set of specific circumstances. Simplistically, utilitarianism proposed that individuals and by extension states should do that which maximised pleasure (in a general sense) and

minimised pain. (This is somewhat complicated by the need to ensure that on the one hand pain is not caused for someone else, while still seeking to maximise the greatest good for the greatest number). (Mill, 1962). Utilitarianism provided psychological concepts which survive in various branches of theory to the present. Firstly the notion of utility itself, which will be defined more fully later, and secondly the idea that maximisation of utility was a desirable goal. This idea pervades most of the mathematically based behavioural models, particularly Subjective Expected Utility Theory (SEU), and its close relation, Expectancy Valence Theory (EV) (both of which will be discussed in detail below).

The capitalistic desire to increase workers' output while minimising fixed costs stimulated much (particularly) American research in the first half of the 20th century. F.W.Taylor's celebrated (although today rather unfashionable) experiments in the philosophy of "scientific management", and Elton Mayo's social psychological engineering at Hawthorne between 1924 and 1932 are two such examples. (Graham, 1974). Mayo's experiments were concerned at least initially with the effects of varying external factors in the workplace in order to maximise the "happiness" of the workers since he felt that only happy workers were productive workers, and happy workers caused fewer avoidable fixed costs in, for example, absenteeism. Ultimately however, it was conceded that little extra was gained from happiness per se, and that much of the variance in each of the trials could be ascribed to a simple form of experimenter effect coupled to the phenomenon of the act of instigating continual changes itself producing different levels of output. (Rothlisberger and Dickson, 1939). Nevertheless, the Hawthorne "effect" was to lead to a movement providing (however selfishly) better working

environments. While the behavioural theories of Mill and Freud (for example) had little practical effect, the theories of both Mayo and Taylor had in turn a tangible effect on the management philosophies of a generation of American businesses and thus their workers.

The work oriented trend reached its height with two examples of "need" theory, both of which are regularly represented in Personnel Management textbooks to this day (see for example Graham, 1974). Maslow (1943) proposed that each individual had a well established series of needs - a "hierarchy" - a) basic physiological needs such as hunger and sleep; b) security needs like warmth and shelter; c) belonging or affection needs; d) ego or esteem needs and e) self-actualisation needs - the need to "be all you can be". Maslow's own work is, even by his own admission, full of exceptions and contradictions, but has nevertheless influenced a generation of managers (Landy and Trumbo, 1980). Similarly, Herzberg's "Two Factor Theory" had great influence, yet was never satisfactorily tested, and is not taken seriously today, at least by academics if not always by managers (Locke and Henne, 1986). MacGregor's "theory x" and "theory y" are an example of a synthesis of the lineages of Taylor and Maslow which still guide much management thinking. (MacGregor, 1960; Graham, 1974.)

A parallel view was offered by the behaviourist movement in America in the 1920s and 1930s. They viewed decision making rather differently from the Freudians, in asserting that decisions should be viewed as discrete events, isolated from other occurrences and as the product of stimuli and behaviours. This philosophy could be viewed as an example of an information processing type of approach, more recently facilitated by the development of

computer technology. Also, the notion that such a "black box" constitutes an acceptable description of the principal component of a decision process is still very much held by proponents of mathematically based utility theories. Tolman (1932) suggested (in essence) that people (and animals) learn to do those things which they perceive as leading to (highly) valued outcomes. Modern expectancy theory follows directly from Tolman and the behaviourist movement. Indeed it was Lewin (1935) who first defined the central concept of valence - the basis of expectancy theory.

These are only a few examples of the kinds of theory historically proposed to account for behaviour. Each of these theories represents something of the lineage towards mathematically based utility theories either in their individual elements or in the purpose to which they were put. Utility theory has, in its various forms, been perhaps the most pervasive of all capitalist theories of behaviour, certainly in academic circles, if less so in front-line personnel management. In the following section utility theories will be examined in depth.

### Utility Theories

It is surely a comment on Western society that the most fertile ground for the production of academic theories of motivation is the industrial workplace. (For an extensive review see Campbell and Pritchard, in Dunnette, 1976). Thus, SEU and EV have been used in attempts to for example improve output, reduce absence as well as simply to explain action. SEU will be examined first, and later, more fully, EV.

SEU theory had been suggested in parts and different combinations for some years prior to 1954, when Edwards brought them together in perhaps the first formal statement of the theory. (Edwards, 1954, 1964). An individual is faced with a decision : each action he can take has a consequence or consequences, each of which is desirable to a greater or lesser extent. Similarly, each consequence has a greater or lesser chance of coming to pass. Fischhoff, Golstein and Shapira (1982) offer a procedure thus :

*List all feasible courses of action. For each action, enumerate all possible consequences, assess the attractiveness or aversiveness of its occurrence, as well as the probability that it will be incurred should the action be taken. Compute the expected worth of each consequence by multiplying its worth by the probability of its occurrence. The expected worth of the action is the sum of the expected worth of all possible consequences. Once the calculations are completed, choose the action with the greatest expected worth.*

More formally, the desirability of a consequence is its utility and the likelihood of its occurrence, its expectation. Two points will be apparent from the quote. Firstly, SEU is essentially mathematical and rational, and secondly it demands maximisation.

The use of assessed probabilities has proved to be a problem for SEU because of its emphasis on "correct" usage of the concept. Tversky and Kahneman (1974) note that, even where people use probability in their decision making, they are likely to do so in terms alien to the probability theorist. They note that people are likely to use simple heuristics like "availability" or "representativeness" to make apparently probabilistic judgements. Various researchers have uncovered biases in the assessment of probabilities (Lichtenstein, Fischhoff and Phillips, 1977; Fischhoff, Slovic and

Lichtenstein, 1977; Wyer 1974; Kahneman and Tversky, 1973; Slovic, Fischhoff and Lichtenstein, 1976). DeLeo and Pritchard (1974) found test-retest reliabilities of as little as .52 - .56 on verbal assessments.

While there is no doubt that SEU is successful in accurately predicting decisions over a wide spectrum of areas and situations, there are many drawbacks and objections to its use. Since these are, for the most part, the same as those for EV, these will be dealt with in the section below.

### Expectancy Theory

In many respects, expectancy theory is similar to SEU, if less rigorously mathematical. Vroom's seminal work, "Work and Motivation" (1964) was, like Edwards' to SEU, more a drawing together of previously disparate ideas than actually breaking new ground.

"Work and Motivation" (1964) contains two models for the interaction of variables with the goal of predicting firstly choice and secondly levels of effort, and thus "motivation". As described, the components of Vroom's theory were not in themselves new, although his combination of them provided the originality of his model.

In these models there are three essential components. The first of these is the notion of "valence". For this concept Vroom developed the definition of Lewin of some 30 years previously, namely a positive or negative affect towards a particular future consequence of an action. From this definition it



may be clear that Vroom saw a valence as a subjective perception. Thus, for Vroom, the experienced affect which accrues from the outcome when it has been achieved is described as "value". In talking of expectancy research therefore, it is important to distinguish between the two concepts.

Outcomes themselves can be split into two levels. A second order outcome is one which may follow from the attainment of a first order outcome. For the most part, as we shall see, Vroom deals with the latter. Thus, to give an example, for a schoolpupil the first order outcome of "highers" may lead to the second order outcome of a "university place". A first order outcome may thus be instrumental in attaining a second order outcome. This provides the second of Vroom's components, namely Instrumentality. Landy and Trumbo (1980) characterise an Instrumentality as the answer to the question "what's in it for me?" (p334)

An Instrumentality is best thought of as a correlation between two events describing the strength of the probability that one will lead to the other. The third of Vroom's concepts is "expectancy". This is defined as the subjective probability that an action will lead to an outcome. In terms of the example quoted above, expectancy would be the subjective assessment of the probability that a given level of effort would result in the passing of the requisite number of highers.

#### Vroom's Models

The first of Vroom's models is the "valence" model. It concerns the estimation of the valence of the first order outcome. It is clear that first



order outcomes need not be highly valued in themselves but may merely be seen as valuable in attaining better things. Thus to attach a simple one-dimensional estimate of valence would be meaningless in a number of situations. To account for this, Vroom suggested that a correct estimate of the valence should be the result of the interaction between the valence of the second outcome and the perceived instrumentality relationship between the two levels of outcome. Mathematically, Vroom sees this as the sum of the products of the valences of the second order outcomes multiplied by their instrumentalities, thus:

$$V_j = f \sum_{k=1}^n [ (V_k I_{jk}) ]$$

$V_j$  is the first order outcome

$V_k$  is all the second order outcomes

$I_{jk}$  is the instrumentality relationship

That something be valued is not, according to Vroom, enough in itself to dispose someone to act. He suggests that an "expectancy" component is therefore necessary. To accommodate this, Vroom has proposed a force model. Thus the "force" on someone to act is a function of both "valence" as defined in the first model, and "expectancy" thus:

$$F_i = f \sum_{j=1}^n [ (E_{ij} V_j) ]$$

$F_i$  is the force to perform act  $i$

$E_{ij}$  is the expectancy that  $i$  leads to  $j$

$V_j$  is the valence of outcome  $j$

Essentially this means that the chosen action is the one where the "force" is maximised, the chosen level of effort the maximum product of VIE.

### Modifications

Vroom perceived his models as a starting point for research, and in this he was correct, since, as reviews such as Mitchell (1974), and Campbell and Pritchard (1976) show, many studies have taken the basic EV formulation and developed upon it. Three such studies relevant to the current research will be briefly outlined.

While Porter and Lawler (1968) abandon the terminology used by Vroom, their constructs are broadly similar. Rewards to Porter and Lawler are essentially the same as outcomes to Vroom, and perceived reward is similar to the valence (Campbell and Pritchard, 1976). Porter and Lawler see the level of effort that the individual will expend as being a function of the perceived value of reward and the effort - reward probability. This second concept is a two stage function depending on perceptions of the effort - performance, and the performance - reward relationships.

The major modification proposed by Porter and Lawler was their incorporation of the notion of a feedback loop into the basic model. They proposed two such loops. The first dealt with the perception of the effort - reward relationship. Clearly, this perception will change over time in the light of the actual management of reward, both by the individual, and by the organisation. The second loop concerns the perceived equity of the reward gained. If the obtained reward does not match the individual's perception of

the deserved level of reward then clearly his perception of those elements which involve reward will radically alter.

These feedback loops formalise a proposition by Vroom that experience is important as a determinant of the levels of perceived valence and instrumentality. A third loop has been proposed by Lawler (1971, 1973) to deal with the effect of failure or success on self-esteem and the corresponding re-estimation of the expectancy likely as a result. Lawler (1971) also perceived a two stage effort-performance and performance-reward relationship. Although not explanations as to the derivation of perceptions, these loops are an attempt to account for the ways they may alter over time. As such, they advance the basic theory.

The second modification is that of Herriot, (Herriot and Ecob, 1979). Herriot offers two extensions to the basic theory. The first is the proposition that different models may predict best in different situations. In a study of job preference among engineering students, Herriot compared eight increasingly complex models based on an EV formulation. None of the eight proved to be an ideal predictor for all the outcomes, suggesting that the search for the single best predictive model, even in an area as narrow as engineering job preference, is futile.

Herriot further suggests that the traditional maximisation of products method is poor. He suggests that products ought to be considered before summation and compared on their ability to differentiate between alternatives. Thus, if all alternatives rate equally on an outcome, that outcome should be discarded, since it does not aid in differentiation. This

would greatly simplify the decision process. As will become clear later, this method is at the root of various heuristics or non-optimal decision strategies.

The final modification which will be considered here is that of Kerr (1982). Working in the area of take-up of benefit among pensioners, Kerr proposed a two stage model of claiming. Clearly prediction would be enhanced if those for whom the issue was not salient could be, in some way, excluded from the calculation. The traditional method of doing this would be to use moderator variables retrospectively. Kerr, however, adopted a "threshold" approach. He proposed that it would be possible to identify those people who would not consider claiming by assessing their position relative to various criteria labelled "thresholds". These thresholds included for example, perceived need and perceived eligibility. If, for example, a pensioner perceived that he or she was somehow ineligible to claim an allowance, or if he or she felt that there was no need for such money, he or she would thus "fail to attain" the threshold and it would thus be predicted that he or she would not apply for the benefit. This represents a significant advance on the basic EV formulation.

This notion worked well in Kerr's experimental situation giving significantly improved rates of predictive success. It also had the effect of improving the explanatory powers of the model since an explanation of (at least) non take up could be offered. Most EV formulations do not seek to explain anything of the process. While none of Kerr's thresholds are directly transferable to the context of educational choice, the general concept is of value, and will therefore be included in the study.

### Some Problems With EV

In this section, two of the major problem areas of EV theory will be examined. Firstly, the difficulties encountered with the methodology of EV in, for example, across-subject and within-subject designs, and in the actual measurement of the constructs, and secondly the more fundamental objections to the axioms of the theory. The last part of the section will attempt to assess the current status of EV theory.

#### Within and Across-Subjects Designs

Vroom's initial conceptualisation of the nature of the theory was unequivocally of a within-subjects design. Despite this, Mitchell (1974) reported that not a single study to that date had used a proper within-subjects design. Eight years later, however, he was able to report that the situation had improved to the extent of a few, but still a minority of methodologically pure studies. (Mitchell, 1982). In general, these studies had produced significantly higher correlations than across-subjects techniques. For example, Muchinsky (1977), in a direct comparison, found a within-subjects correlation of .57 but an across-subjects correlation of only .31 in predicting effort in an academic task.

The two designs ask fundamentally different questions of the theory. An across-subjects design asks which dimensions correlate with the criterion variable, while the within-subjects design is implicitly a test of the theory, asking if the constructs so combined predict the criterion variable. The two designs also embody different assumptions about the nature of the

constructs. Clearly a demand of across-subjects designs is that the rated constructs have shared meaning. It is all too apparent that error variance will escalate at an alarming rate if this demand is not met in full. It is, however, difficult to guarantee in practice. Within-subjects techniques embody no such problem, since there is no need for any construct to mean anything other than its meaning to a specific individual. This allows for both individualistic and weak conceptualisations. Even in within-subjects designs, however, it is important that the nature of the meaning of instrumentality and so on are clearly understood, but this is a problem with almost any type of theory under test.

Mitchell (1982) notes in summation that the nearer a model and design approach the theoretical formulation of Vroom, the higher the accuracy in prediction. He goes as far as to say that across-subjects designs are a *"misrepresentation of the theory"*. (Page 305)

### Measurement

Behling and Starke (1973) have contested that since EV is essentially similar to SEU it ought to be more rigorously mathematical. The essential problem with such an approach would be that human beings are intensively subjective in their assessment of probability, and thus the goal of "objective" measurement is likely to remain unfulfilled, remaining a tool of theorists and planners. There are issues on which EV researchers appear cavalier in their treatment. One such problem for example is transitivity. Essentially, this means that "If  $A > B$  and  $B > C$  then  $A > C$ ". If A is not greater than C

then clearly any ordering of outcomes is invalidated. Both Tversky (1969) and Zagorski (1975) have constructed situations where people are not transitive in their ordering of choices. A related problem is that of the subjective probabilities of compound events being greater than the sum of the parts. (see Slovic, Fischhoff and Lichtenstein, 1976).

The whole problem of probability permeates such research. With so much of the nature of EV being bound by the reliability of subjective probability estimates, it is perhaps surprising that so little attention has been paid to the problem.

Schmidt (1973) notes that a ratio scaling should be essential if the components are to be subsequently multiplied. He suggests that a tightening of this procedure would lead to an improvement in results. Few researchers since, however, seem to have considered the practical difficulties of such a course of action worthwhile. A similar sort of problem is the possibility that E, V and I may not be independent. For the summed products approach to make any sense, it is important that the intercorrelation of the constructs is as low as possible, although it is difficult to see how this would be possible in such a narrow area as human perception of events. It seems highly unlikely that this goal would be approached, and indeed Gavin (1970) reports a correlation of no less than .91 between certain measures of instrumentality and valence, although this may be extreme. Studies comparing the relative predictive powers of the elements of EV tend to support this notion, since a multiplicative formulation rarely gives a significantly higher correlation than that of any of the parts. Schmidt and Son (1981) for example went further in noting that a simple summation of the

Instrumentalities predicted as well as the rigorous maximisation of some products of I and V. Arnold, (1981) however, found support for a multiplicative formulation, while Stahl and Harrell (1981) seemed to support both the summation of  $I + V$  and  $I \times V$ , a point noted by Mitchell in reviews (1974, 1982). He suggests that :

*...at the moment we are left with the somewhat vague conclusion that, although Es, Is and Vs are related to a variety of .....attitudes and behaviours, their rules of combination require further clarification. (Mitchell, 1982)*

Other possible methodological problems include, for example, whether to treat valence as anticipated satisfaction or simply importance. Strictly speaking it should be the former, but it is likely that subjects tend to view it as the latter. Pecotich and Churchill (1981), however, in a study of salesmen, report that, in fact, this makes little practical difference.

Leon (1981) notes that subjects find difficulty with the notion of a negative valence. While happy to treat positive valences as a scale, they regard negatively valent outcomes as "all or nothing" events, with no scaling or graduation. Ilgen et al (1981) compared a variety of types of measure of V and I but did not find overwhelming support for any one type over the others.

As well as methodological problems, there are a number of serious conceptual problems with the theory, several of which will be dealt with in the next section.



### Model ≠ Process?

One of the most fundamental objections to EV and SEU is that neither decision model gives much insight into the decision process. Utility models treat decisions as essentially a series of inputs and outputs - essentially a "black box". Simon (1983) states that :

*the SEU model finesses completely the origins of the values that enter into the utility function; they are simply there, already organised to express consistent preferences among all alternative futures which may be presented for choice. The SEU model finesses just as completely the process for ascertaining the facts of the present and future states of the world. At best the model tells us how to reason about facts and value premises; It says nothing about where they come from.*

The same holds equally true for EV.

To be fair, it is doubtful whether any proponent of the theory would hold that the model does fully describe and explain the process involved in reaching the decision. Whether this is unsatisfactory depends to a great extent on the purpose of the formulation. If the goal of the research is to predict behaviour or intent, then EV can be successful, and sufficient. It can provide a clear prediction given a series of specific inputs and mathematical transformations, but its explanatory power seems limited. The imposition of predefined variables loses much information on the variety of highly valued outcomes, since in any practical sense it is impossible to generate all outcomes relevant to all participants in a study. Similarly, the imposition of

maximising of utility presupposes that this in fact takes place. This seems little more valid than attempts to "fit" all behaviours social and economic to a, for example, utilitarian or Marxist explanation. A further example would perhaps be in the field of personality assessment when rigorous conceptualisations of extraversion and introversion (Eysenck, 1970) mask much of the range of motivational explanation.

If explanation is required, then EV may be considered inappropriate, and something more is required. Kerr's threshold approach (Kerr 1982) goes some way towards meeting this objection. As noted above, Kerr used certain criteria to "exclude" pensioners for whom there would be no likelihood of application. It is perfectly possible that most of the pensioners so removed would, in the event, have been successfully "predicted" by the model. However, firstly this is not certain, and clearly the possibility of error variance is somewhat increased, and secondly no explanation of, at least, non application would be possible. In any event, it is unlikely that the questions themselves would have had any meaning for these pensioners and thus a prediction of "no application" would be rather artificial. Essentially Kerr was establishing the salience of the decision for the experimental group, excluding those for whom the decision was not salient and thus explaining why they did not apply for Supplementary Benefits.

A clear illustration of the weakness of EV is provided by Shanteau and Phelps (1975) who, in a study of judges at livestock competitions, demonstrated that, although a strict mathematical model would predict well, in reality, judges used altogether different strategies, relying on attributes which best differentiated the stock, rather than maximising total attributes.

### Rationality and the Concept of Maximisation

Clearly a *sine qua non* of expectancy theory is that the decision maker must be rational. Simon (1976) defines two forms of rationality, the second of which, procedural rationality, is relevant here. He states that a behaviour can be considered rational if it is the "outcome of appropriate deliberation". If "appropriate" is related to the success of optimisation, (i.e. by result), then clearly, due to the frailties of human information processing, in these terms a decision can never be completely rational. Given the difficulty of inferring "process" (see above), a safer answer may be to suggest that humans only may be rational, since we cannot be certain from the EV formulation that an "appropriate process" is involved. Thus, in order to subscribe to the basis of EV theory it is necessary to assume rationality, since, almost by definition in Simon's terms, it cannot be demonstrated. This distinction is, however, purely academic, since in practical terms a working assumption is perfectly valid.

Edwards (1954) makes the following assumptions about "economic man" :

*what is economic man like ? He has three properties. a) He is completely informed. b) He is infinitely sensitive. c) He is rational.*

Clearly these are large assumptions. The assumption of perfect knowledge is an economic convention which has no basis in psychological fact. It takes little time to comprehend that perfect knowledge is impossible for all but the most simple decisions.

Simon (1983) notes :

*the SEU model assumes that the decision maker contemplates, in one comprehensive view, everything which lies before him. He understands the range of alternatives, not only at the moment, but over the whole panorama of the future. He understands the consequences of each of the available choice strategies, at least up to the point of being able to assign a joint probability distribution to the future states of the world. He has reconciled or balanced all his conflicting partial values and synthesised them into a single utility function that orders, by his preference for them, all these future states of the world.*

Miller (1956) has established that there are strict limits on the amount of information a subject can deal with at one time. Clearly this places great doubts on the value of economic man as a concept.

Simon (1972 and 1983), however, observes that people do not need as much information as seems to be implied by the notion of economic man. For example in a shop purchase a decision may be made on the basis of the single attribute of price. Thus in a sense the "market" has simplified the information required into one item - price. Simon (1972) offers the example of a chess player faced with  $10^{120}$  possible permutations in the course of a game. At any one time he is faced with the immediate possibility of up to 30 legal moves. While it is not impossible to consider all 30, given sufficient time, empirical studies by De Groot (1965) suggest that players concentrate on only a few, and try to maximise among these.

Simon (1955 etc) has proposed that people simplify their decision worlds wherever they can, trying to reach decisions on the basis of as few pieces

of information as is practicable. He has characterised this as "bounded rationality". He notes :

*within the behavioural model of bounded rationality, one doesn't have to make choices that are infinitely deep in time, that encompass the whole range of human values, and in which each problem is interconnected with all the other problems of the world. In actual fact, the environment in which we live.....is an environment that is nearly factorable into separate problems.*

From a psychological point of view it seems more likely that bounded rationality, and not economic man with his perfect knowledge, provides a truer picture of decision making.

Expectancy theorists have attempted to encompass Simon's strictures by using the concept of salience. This means essentially that decision makers assess only those outcomes previously identified as important - salient.

In a sense, the adoption of bounded rationality does not seriously undermine the EV formulation. Since EV is a within-subjects concept, at least in theory, the amount of information possessed by an individual is functionally perfect - the decision maker can still "maximise" (but not optimise) on the basis of this limited information. Alternatively Klein (1983) notes that attempts have been made to account for bounded rationality by the inclusion of allowances for search costs and resulting diminishing returns in SEU formulations.

## Satisficing

The most direct attack on the concepts of utility theories is on the notion that a rational decision maker will maximise his gain in all situations, in Vroom's formulation that the decision maker will choose the strategy by which the utility is maximised. In order to do this in an EV formulation, the decision maker has to look in depth at all his alternative courses of action and assess them. Simon suggests that in reality this does not happen. People find an alternative with which they are generally happy, and this is the alternative which is chosen. There is no conscious attempt at rational maximisation. (That is not to say of course that the action chosen may not be objectively optimal, but if it is, it is coincidental). Simon (1955) suggests that :

*Most human decision making ... is concerned with the discovery and selection of satisfactory alternatives; only in exceptional cases is it concerned with the discovery and selection of optimal alternatives. To optimise requires processes several orders of magnitude more complex than those required to satisfice.*

This is, in essence, the notion of "satisficing". It is compelling for several reasons. Firstly, it combines well with bounded rationality to offer a model which can be seen to approximate to a process. Secondly, from a psychological point of view, satisficing requires neither perfect knowledge nor maximisation, which, as we have seen above, seem to be outwith the capabilities of human information processing. (Indeed Simon (1983) suggests that to properly apply the SEU model in a decision of any complexity would be beyond the capacity of even the largest computer.) Thirdly, for most

decision makers, time is a scarce resource, and thus the search costs could be prohibitively high - the marginal value of the decision would decrease as search costs escalated. (c.f. Klein, 1983, op cit).

There have been a number of studies which have demonstrated the futility of a maximisation approach. Shanteau and Phelps (1975 and 1978) have noted that livestock judges rarely rely on the spectrum of attributes, preferring to concentrate their deliberations on the small number of attributes which best differentiate the stock. Herriot and Ecob (1979) suggest that a better method of prediction would be to compare attributes before summation and utilise only those which would aid prediction. The theory behind such a procedure is essentially similar to that behind salience - only the most important are used in the assessment. This does create a conceptual problem since the application of regression analysis, while leading to increased predictive accuracy is almost certain to lead to the masking or discarding of elements which may be crucial to understanding the nature of the decision.

Burton, Kates and White (1976) note that the decision to act in the face of threat (to property) from natural hazard (flood) is more or less a function of personality, previous experience and peer group compliance. Further, they note that it is possible to expose a farmer to a wide range of information sources on which to base his decision, yet still he is likely to use a single reading from a neighbour's rain gauge or indeed do as he has done in previous years. Kuhnreuther (1978) demonstrates that people can apparently ignore risk in their decision to purchase property insurance. He showed that people had little conception of probability and rarely took account of more than a small number of short term factors, despite their being in a high

risk (from floods and earthquakes) area, at least as measured by "objective" criteria.

The response to these sorts of criticisms by proponents of EV has been to alter the focus of the question from "*Is EV relevant?*" to "*when is EV relevant?*" and thus institute a search for boundary conditions. Current research is focussing on ways to increase prediction using for example thresholds, moderator variables and more than one model per situation. This is disappointing since it seems to duck the essential question of the worth of EV.

#### Wherefore EV?

To answer this question it seems relevant to return to a point above made regarding the purpose of EV. Clearly EV cannot be regarded as a process description. It is, however a very successful aid to prediction. Simon's notion of satisficing undermines the structure of the theory (see also, for example, Kuhnreuther et al (1978) or Herriot and Ecob (1979)), yet still it works. In a sense, decision analysts have "satisficed" - they have found a theory and a methodology which suits their purposes, and while acknowledging that it is far from perfect, it works so well that they continue to use it.

#### Development of Non-Optimising Strategies

The notion of satisficing does not bring with it a complete picture of each decision process; a variety of alternative strategies, each of which is non-optimal (in the sense of a conscious decision having been taken) have been



developed. For the most part, these have followed the observation of decision making in situ using process tracing techniques. For convenience, these will be labelled heuristics. Although it would be impossible to list all heuristics from the literature here, some examples will be offered.

Tversky's (1972) "elimination by attributes" requires a decision maker to construct a conscious or sub-conscious ranking of the attributes any contending strategy would need to satisfy in order to lead to the accomplishment of the desired task. Each strategy is compared on its ability to satisfy the most highly rated attribute. If a clear "winner" emerges, then it should be chosen. If not the next most important attribute is considered and so on. (One obvious application of this method is in certain types of competitive tendering. Tenders are initially compared on a single attribute, price, and only at a later stage might, for example, materials or proposed construction times be considered.)

In a second example, each of the attributes is assigned a minimum acceptable level. Each of the competing strategies is thus compared against the minimum and those which do not meet all the criteria are dropped. If no clear "winner" emerges, the levels of acceptability are reset. This is called the "conjunctive rule" and is developed almost directly from satisficing. (Svenson, 1979). This method has had considerable impact on the field of personnel selection since its philosophy underpins the criterion referencing method of selection whereby attributes required by any candidate to perform the job are derived from a thorough study of the present and similar post holders. Candidates are compared to the criteria directly and progressively eliminated.



Heuristics cover a wide range of combinations of attributes and alternatives. They vary widely in their complexity. An attractive feature of heuristics which helps model decision making is that more than one may be utilised in a single decision analysis. (Klein, 1983). There are inevitably some problems with the application of heuristics. For example it is possible to have combinations of attribute utilities which cannot be differentiated by particular heuristics. Payne (1980) notes that if an alternative is perceived as being generally attractive, this substantially affects the subsequent representation of the decision. Perhaps dissonance reduction is a factor in this. Phelps and Shanteau (1976) note that when intercorrelations of attributes are known or perceived by decision makers, they make apparently perverse judgements. This is because to eliminate attribute A may also mean eliminating a desirable part of attribute B.

Care must also be taken in assessing the range of alternatives and particularly of attributes to be considered, since if non salient elements are included, incorrect strategies might be inferred. As with any value estimate, the utility of each attribute is open to question on the grounds of reliability, transitivity and so on.

#### The Role of Information

Any attempt to mirror accurately a decision process needs to take account of the ways in which information is selected for use by the decision maker. If, as Simon proposes, people simplify their decision world, how is this achieved? SEU and EV have consistently ignored this point. (Simon, 1983). They offer no insight as to how the information is searched for, selected, or

used. In essence, no attempt is made to explain how a valence or utility comes to be assessed or an instrumentality perceived.

For example, a parent may claim to have a high valence for discipline. Is this derived from experience? Is it a reaction to newspaper reports cataloguing instances of indiscipline? Subsequently this parent assesses that School A will not provide a sufficiently disciplined environment. Which sources have been used to establish this view? Is there any evidence of dissonance reduction in the sources cited in support of this view?

To have a clear picture of the decision process it seems foolish to ignore these issues. It is possible that different people tackle information gathering in markedly different ways if at all. The example provided by Burton, Kates and White (op cit) illustrates the danger of assuming that utility, valence or expectancy play any part in the decision process. The farmers cited by these authors had an idiosyncratic approach to information gathering and information use which precluded their inclusion in any traditional formulation of EV or SEU. Utility and instrumentality might be assessed, but they would be meaningless since their decision was essentially atheoretical - they did as they had always done.

A second problem concerns the fact that search costs play an important part in decision making. To account for scarce resources by including time as an outcome to be assessed is clearly unsatisfactory because no analysis is carried out to determine the nature of the decision to terminate the search, and thus into the level of information considered to be sufficient to make a decision. The quality of a decision depends to a great extent on the

Information used, and, by implication, on the information not used. Surely any attempt to describe the decision would be enhanced by such an analysis.

### Legitimation

It is apparent from studies concerned with the adoption of new techniques and information that there are wide individual differences in the attention paid, and the credence given, to various sources of information. Coleman, Kurtz and Metzel (1966) in a study of the process of adoption of new drugs among doctors note what is essentially a dichotomy between sources of information. Most doctors hear of new developments from drug company representatives or from magazines. These are purely information sources. They are not enough in themselves to encourage a doctor to change. For this the doctor may turn to a respected colleague or journal.

This is an important distinction in decision analysis. Poorly framed questioning may pick up only those sources which provide information, without identifying those which perform a legitimising function. Thus, for example, prior to a decision being made, the decision maker may consult a number of sources, making the ultimate decision on non-optimal grounds. After the decision has been made, an authoritative source may be consulted to back-up and thus legitimise the decision.

It will have become clear from the foregoing discussion that EV does not in itself provide a full description of the process of decision making, however successfully it may model. To this end, therefore, the following chapter will

expound a three stage model of parental choice to serve as an experimental basis for the research.

## CHAPTER 3

### A Model of Parental Choice

In a sense a model is a convenient cornerstone on which to build a research project. Ideally, it suggests a line of enquiry which at the earliest stage seems most appropriate while not precluding any diversification into alternative, and more productive areas. It is inevitable that a model will require modification as the research progresses. Thus, in a sense, a model is always provisional. A model does not merely ask "what is going on?", it asks rather "is this going on?"

Why does expectancy theory seem, on first acquaintance, to have relevance to the parental choice decision? This is not intuitively apparent. It would be perfectly possible to propose a model of parental choice rooted in any of the many available theories of motivation. For example, a utilitarian view of parental choice or indeed a Freudian theory could *de facto* be derived. To broaden this further, why choose a psychological perspective at all? Why not another discipline, such as sociology?

Notwithstanding the constraints on the research mentioned in Chapter 2, there appears to be an easy fit between the constructs of expectancy theory and the elements of the parental choice decision which strongly suggests that it would be a productive line of enquiry. This will be discussed more fully below, but it is clear that, each of valence, expectancy and instrumentality can be readily linked to aspects of the school choice

decision, namely the valued outcomes of school and schooling, the subjective perception that a request will succeed and the equally subjective perception that a school can satisfy the desire for the valued outcomes. Essentially, the Expectancy Theory has high face validity - the purpose of the research will be to establish its substantive validity.

#### Towards a Prospective Model

The remainder of this chapter will be directed towards the development of a prospective model of parental choice in a form which can be readily investigated. In order to investigate a model, several conditions need to apply, the most important of which is that the model can be expressed in terms which constitute a prediction as to how, in a given set of circumstances, an individual will behave. Essentially, therefore, what is required is a predictive model of parental choice. Clearly there is a risk entailed in a predictive model - that the model will be inappropriate and thus little will be gained towards assessing the parental choice decision. This risk can be minimised, however, by the simple expedient of collecting sufficient information not directly relevant to the proposed model, that, should some other information be required, a body of data does exist to allow this to be attempted. This seems to be an ideal compromise between power of prediction and safety.

Individuals make decisions which together can constitute a group decision. The most obvious would be a political election. Each voter makes up his or her own mind and thus votes for a particular candidate or party. The aggregation of these individual votes represents the group decision of a



constituency and onwards to the electorate and a choice of governing party. There can therefore be two levels of analysis of a decision, the first at the individual level, the second at the group level.

Vroom (1964) considered expectancy theory to be unequivocally an individual decision. Mitchell (1982) went as far as to suggest that any other approach was a misrepresentation of the theory, and yet much research using expectancy theory concerns itself with just such aggregations. While there is clearly a place for what is essentially an "across-persons" analysis, the main initial thrust of this research will be directed at predicting individual decisions. A consequence of such a decision is that a particular problem associated with "across-persons" analysis is avoided, namely the necessity to have a broad shared meaning of constructs. (The Pilot Study - reported as Chapter 5 - investigated the issue of shared meaning and found clearly that parents' conceptions of apparently similar concepts, for example, "discipline", could in fact be markedly different in detail.)

The two approaches have different implications in terms of criterion variables. In studying parental choice, there are several ways in which a criterion variable could be assessed. For example, a post hoc factual criterion variable would show proof that a child started a particular school at a particular time. This would use behaviour as the criterion.

However, as Fischbein and Ajzen (1975) note, the use of behaviour as a criterion variable has its drawbacks. There is likely to be a temporal gap (up to two months in the Pilot and Second studies and over a year in the Third) between investigating parents' decisions and their making application,



during which time many factors could intervene to alter the decision, or the premises on which it was founded. This has two implications. The first is that in terms of theoretical purity, what is being measured in terms of say "Force" is not the same as obtains at the point of assessing the criterion variable. The second is that the level of predictive success or accuracy is thus likely to be (much) lower because of the temporal gap. It seems better from both points of view to assess the criterion variable at the same time as the other measures. Thus the criterion variable would be intent, not behaviour. In many cases this would be the same, and often it is practical to assess both and to ascribe a correlation between intent and behaviour. In this research, however, the nature of the confidentiality which was required by the Education Authority precluded the use of behaviour, i.e. actual requests made/not made, as a variable, and thus, in fact only intent was available.

It is in the relation of the criterion variable to the predictor that across and within-persons approaches differ. In the context of a dichotomous decision such as this, in across-persons designs the basic tool is a point-biserial correlation coefficient between the sample wide predictions and results. In a within-persons design, it is much more simple, given that analysis is at an individual level, a prediction can thus be either right or wrong in terms of the criterion variable. A correlation coefficient would therefore be inappropriate, and the statistical measure would be the percentage of correct predictions.

The main assumption of this model of parental choice is that parents have consciously or otherwise assessed viable aspects of school provision in terms of their attractiveness or aversiveness. Thus it is assumed that parents will be able to answer a (hypothetical) question probing "what they want from a school". Clearly this can be in terms both of attractive and aversive features. Thus, for example, a parent may have a positive affect towards strong discipline in a school but a negative affect towards religious education. In essence, the measure of this affect is a valence.

Since schools are not identical, it would be logical to assume that not all are equally proficient in all areas. Undoubtedly, each parent is likely to have a view on aspects of this level of proficiency. In terms of the model it does not matter whether there is any factual basis to such a view, since, in this case, it is on subjective rather than objective reality that any decision is likely to be founded. Hence the lack of demand for "corroborative" evidence. This is a consequence of the adoption of a within-persons design for the research. Its demand is rather for internal consistency. (In fact, as will be shown in later chapters, considerable consequences attach to this subjective perception of reality in terms of the implications for the practical effects of parental choice on educational provision.)

This subjective perception is in fact a kind of probability coefficient. In effect the parent is assessing the probability that a particular school would be able to satisfy the particular valued outcomes. This presupposes that the parent has a view of the school's performance on these outcomes, but, as noted above, it seems fair to assume this. This probability

coefficient is an instrumentality. In an ideal circumstance, the probability coefficient would be measured exactly and would satisfy the rigorous criteria set out by Tversky (1972). However, it is unlikely that (a) such circumstances could be obtained and (b) that, thanks to the likely wide band of error variance surrounding the measurement, that it would make a great deal of difference to the end result.

The third measured element of parental perceptions is the expectancy component. In the context of the choice decision, the expectancy is the subjective probability that a request would be granted. Clearly this probability exists for a school to be rated. Objectively, given the situation obtaining throughout the research period, the probability should never be assessed at other than +1.0, since no requests were likely to be refused in either of the study areas. It is, however, quite possible that parents' subjective assessments, particularly with reference to popular, high status schools, may be somewhat different.

For each school, therefore, there are three measured elements, the parents' valued outcomes : the valence; the specific view of the likelihood that their valued outcomes would be satisfied by a school and, more generally, the likelihood that a request would be granted. As shown in Chapter 2, there is a large measure of doubt about the best means of combining these elements. Should it be valence + instrumentality or should it be valence x instrumentality or indeed some other formulation? At this stage it seems sufficient to note that, given that the information would be analysed by computer, exploration of a number of possibilities was eminently feasible, and thus it would be ideal to keep the options open.

To summarise, the provisional model of parental choice calls for the maximisation of the sum of products of valence and instrumentality moderated by the perception of expectation. In terms of the choice faced by parent, the maximisation of the sum of products of the affect towards or away from an outcome and the perceived likelihood of its being satisfied moderated by the likelihood of a request being granted.

The following sections will seek to build on the above formulation by exploring its weaknesses in terms of the parental choice decision and by proposing additional features which greatly enhance the power of the model.

#### Passive and Active Choice

In its simplest terms, the choice facing a parent (or a child over 16) is whether the child will remain at, or attend, a nominated catchment area school, the identity of which is specified in advance by the Education Authority, or request that he or she be sent to a school nominated as an alternative by the parent (or child). While this appears simple, there are complex elements to the decision. Where the parent is given the chance to decide on an alternative school, it would appear that he/she either does or does not make a request. In fact what may happen is that the parent may do three, not two things. At an early stage a decision must be taken whether to consider a choice of alternative school or whether to accept the default option. If the former, then the parent may still in the end choose the original default option, but with the significant difference that he or she

has considered other possible alternatives. This is essentially the difference between active and passive choice. Expectancy theory addresses active choice - It has nothing to say about passive choice.

The existence of active and passive choice suggests that the traditional one stage model of expectancy theory would be inadequate to fully describe the parental choice decision. For this reason, a second, and in reality preparatory, stage must be introduced - the threshold.

#### Accounting for Passive Choice

While the proportions of active and passive choice are a matter for conjecture, their existence seems indisputable. Without means of accounting for this passive choice, a significant cost would be paid both in terms of the predictive power, and more importantly in terms of the explanatory power of the model, and thus a way of screening passive choosers must be established.

Kerr (1981) established a precedent for such a threshold stage. Kerr examined pensioners' decisions about whether to apply for Supplementary Benefits to which they were, in fact, entitled. It was clear that a large number of his sample would not be in a position to make such a choice, for various reasons, (for example due to their infirmity or bereavement). Similarly, others perceiving no need for the benefit would be highly unlikely to apply, even though other aspects of an expectancy theory

formulation would indicate otherwise. Kerr therefore proposed a series of thresholds on which each pensioner would be assessed. Should they fail to "attain" a threshold this would be regarded as an automatic prediction of non-application, and also a powerful explanation of why they did not apply. Others have used moderator variables retrospectively to similar end. (Hobart and Dunnette, 1967). However, Kerr's approach seems much more valid in coupling prediction and explanation.

#### Proposed Thresholds

Kerr (1981) utilised three main thresholds in studying the claiming decisions of pensioners : perceived need; perceived utility and perceived stability. The use of "perceived" in the nomenclature of each clearly indicates the subjective nature of each threshold. Application would be considered not on the basis of whether need was present, but on whether it was perceived to be present. Kuhnreuther (1978) demonstrated the same concept in terms of the decision to purchase insurance - those "objectively" at risk had also to perceive themselves subjectively as at risk.

Kerr's (1981) thresholds were derived specifically to explain the decisions of pensioners and are not transferable directly to the present research. For the purpose of establishing a provisional model, a number of thresholds will be described to be subsequently refined in the context of the experimental findings.

### a. Sallence

It is self evident that a parent for whom the decision is perceived not to be salient is unlikely to make a placing request. While the reasons for such perceptions may be complex and individualistic, two basic aspects underly sallence : knowledge and interest.

The provisions of the Education (Scotland) Act 1981, as set out in Chapter 1, make lack of knowledge unlikely. Parents must be informed by the Education Authority of the decision they may make, and be given sufficient warning to allow them to make up their minds. A related problem in terms of sallence would be ignorance of procedures in making a request, and similarly of the general conditions and exclusions. Again this has been made more unlikely by virtue of the statutory provisions. The knowledge aspects of sallence are thus fairly straightforward. In order to make a decision it is not necessary to have complete information, it is enough to have a broad general idea of what is involved and what to do, or indeed who to ask what to do.

It may well be, of course, that at the margin, a lack of detailed knowledge alone would be a barrier to application, in that there would be little or no incentive to find out more. In this case, it is likely that other thresholds may also come into play or indeed dissatisfaction (see below), and thus it is unlikely that solely lack of detailed knowledge would be a significant barrier. While this is an exposition of the knowledge aspects of sallence in theoretical terms, in a practical situation, the intervention of a researcher is likely to lead to a de facto increase in substantive knowledge, and thus

affect responses and perceptions. Similarly, it is well documented that respondents have a tendency to "fake good" (see e.g. Cronbach 1961, Anastasi 1968, Buros 1977 etc) by pretending that they are (in this case) in possession of much more information than in fact is the case. For both these reasons, it is important to establish salience early in an interview (when the purpose is not clearly stated in advance), otherwise both interviewer effect and faking good are possible.

Whether or not a parent has an amount of substantive information is rendered irrelevant if they have no interest in education. It is quite possible for many parents to take no part in the formal process of education, (for example by not attending parents' nights, PTA or whatever), and yet still retain an interest in their child's education in the informal sense of offering help and encouragement, (by asking about progress or even funding school led visits). These parents would be, in this context, "Interested". On the other hand there are similarly likely to be parents who take no interest in any aspect of their child's education. These parents are not "Interested". (In a practical sense it is highly unlikely that anyone so disinterested would consent to being interviewed at all).

Thus salience can be seen to have two constituent parts, knowledge and interest.



### b.Responsibility

By way of example, it seems useful to consider a corporate decision maker. Each executive is likely to have a strictly defined place within the hierarchical structure of the organisation. Each is likely to be afforded an amount (greater or lesser) of discretion to make decisions in only a limited number of areas. The first question therefore asked by a corporate decision maker is not "what should I do?" but "is this decision mine to take?" In many cases the answer will be "no" and the problem will be passed on to someone else within the hierarchy who will accept or reject the problem as they see fit. (See Simon 1955).

Faced by the right to make a choice decision, each parent must ask the same question as the corporate decision maker, and only if the answer is in the affirmative can they proceed. Of course, this question is likely to be "asked" at a subconscious level and will only emerge should the answer be "no".

### c.Stability

Among those pensioners studied by Kerr there were a number for whom their home situation was a barrier to application. Reasons for this included health and medical problems both for respondents and spouses, and bereavement. Clearly among a sample of parents of school age children the incidence of health problems is likely to be lower, and bereavement rare. However, there are many other situations which would affect the likelihood

of making a placing request. Among traumatic situations, the most likely occurrence would be divorce. In such a situation the salience of a school choice decision would be low. It is similarly likely that a proportion of a sample of parents of school age children would either have recently moved into an area or would be in the process of, or likely to, move out. In most cases this would preclude making a placing request, at least in terms of local schools, and make it less likely in the intended locale due to lack of knowledge of the range of possibilities. It would be impossible to enumerate a range of such variables since, by its very nature, stability is particular to a family and thus not directly generalisable to others.

### Summary

The essence of the use of a threshold is to seek to explain the instance of a passive decision. Should a parent "fail" to pass any of these thresholds it follows that no placing request would be made and the default option of the catchment area school implemented. However, it would be wrong to view each of these thresholds mechanistically. Such a view would ascribe general points or values beyond which a request would be deemed likely, and conversely below which a request would be deemed unlikely. In fact, thresholds are likely to be highly individualistic. Even if any could be measured objectively to allow comparison of levels across subjects it seems certain that a level which would preclude one parent would not necessarily preclude another. This is the essence of a "within-persons" view of the threshold. In viewing it as a continuous rather than dichotomous variable it can be better used as an explanatory tool.

### Dissatisfaction

There are two alternative conceptualisations of the role and position of the catchment area (default) school within an active choice model (see above). The first is perhaps the one suggested by a traditional EV formulation, that the school is considered jointly with all the others in the delineated set. The second demands that parents be dissatisfied with the default option before proceeding to make a choice among only alternative schools. Thus, when given the opportunity to choose a school for their child, the parent asks, consciously or otherwise, "am I satisfied?" If the answer to this question is "yes" then the default option, the catchment area school, is chosen. If, however, the answer to the question is "no", then the parent enters a choice phase. In contrast to the first conceptualisation above, the catchment area school is not considered on an equal footing and serves only as a minimum benchmark. The chosen school will come from the subset of those perceived to be better than the catchment area school.

Should the existence of this "dissatisfaction hypothesis" be demonstrated, there would be clear implications for a proposed model of parental choice. While the thresholds of salience, responsibility, and stability form a preparatory stage to a parental choice model, they are best viewed as possible barriers to reaching a position where the option of making a placing request becomes open. Dissatisfaction would be, however, a true first stage in a two-stage model. Thus a parent would first assess dissatisfaction, then, if appropriate, other schools. Thus the view summarised by the first conceptualisation may be shown to be erroneous. It is this view, however, which is suggested both by a traditional expectancy

approach (discussed in Chapter 2) and the aims of the legislation (discussed in Chapter 1). A single stage model may then be considered to be inadequate and a two stage model following the second conceptualisation above would be appropriate.

While in one sense the prospective model is completed by the addition of threshold and dissatisfaction to the basic expectancy formulation this only goes as far as the point at which Simon criticises EV in terms of its "finessing" the origins of the subjective perceptions which are the core of the model. In essence, what has been hitherto proposed has been a predictive model. In order to move towards being an explanatory model it seems essential to investigate the role of information and information gathering in parental choice decisions.

#### Information Gathering

In some ways information selection and processing are the most interesting aspects of the parental choice decisions. As outlined in Chapter 1, politicians have a particular view of parents' information levels. Sir Keith Joseph, in addressing his party conference saw parents as making "informed choices" (op cit Chapter 1). The statement carries a clear implication that parents are in possession of sufficient information with which to make such a decision. Whether this is in fact the case is open to question.

The parental choice provisions of the Education (Scotland) Act (1981) contain clear directives to schools to make a limited amount of information

available to parents on a wide variety of topics. Many brochures go far beyond this level. (For a fuller discussion, see Appendix 1). The 1983 brochure for one of the schools in the city of Edinburgh, for example, contains no fewer than 8 sections and 60 subsections, covering reports, examinations, health and safety, computers in school and a vast number of other details. (Appendix 1). The brochure is exactly 100 pages and is, in terms of detail and scope, a prospectus or offer for sale in all but name. The goods on the market are the educational experiences of the school in question.

Elliot et al (1981) studied parents' views of four schools in England in the wake of the 1980 legislation. They quote one parent :

*you feel they want you to know about the place. Of course you forget - I did read it at the time and really the only thing I remember is things I wanted to know like school uniform - obviously the things I need to know.....couldn't tell you about it apart from these things.....(p61)*

Certainly this is one view. An opposite may be that the parent, say a parent with an open mind, as in conceptualisation one, (see previous section), reads and analyses the apparent strengths and weaknesses as far as are apparent in a brochure. Such parents glean information from a brochure.

The contrast in parents' approaches may be conceived as being that between passive and active. On one hand, those actively seeking information, on the other those passively seeking confirmation of a decision already, or at least provisionally, made. This latter process is essentially a form of post hoc

rationalisation. Parents seek some formal justification for their decision. They would be embarrassed by an assertion that their decisions are not based on information. In fact, to counteract this, they seek corroborative "facts". This would not be an active decision made on the basis of information gathered, and it is important to make such a distinction.

Brochures are only part of the information set available to parents. Schools distribute a great deal of other printed information. Elliot (op cit) calculated that one of his study schools produced 30 000 words for parents in a single year. It is no wonder that a parent observed "you could be reading War and Peace" (p69).

It is not, of course, only through the printed word that schools provide information in the broadest sense. A large proportion of prospective parents fall into either (or both) of two categories :

1) Those who are already parents of children at the school. These parents receive information about the school directly and indirectly from their children - from their progress, their reports, their stories. Perhaps more important, they receive information from parents' nights and open days. There, they are afforded the opportunity to view both the situation and condition of the school itself, and also the teaching staff. In a sense, too, the teachers represent another face of the school's promotional effort. Just as a rude and unhelpful switchboard operator/receptionist can harm a firm's business, so can a bad impression fostered by a teacher tarnish a school's image. The school may thus lose business, that is, pupils. Current parents

are also likely to be highly aware of the position of the school within the community - a topic which will be discussed more fully below.

2) Intending parents may be likely to visit the school prior to their child starting (whether in advance of deciding to send their children to that school is another matter). Such visits can be crucial in fostering the image of the school. Anderson (1983) in the pamphlet "Detecting Bad Schools" notes that many indicators can be gained in a short visit by, for example, observing staff and pupils, playgrounds, the demeanour and indeed the status of the member of staff assigned to conduct the parent. While it is unlikely that parents will pursue such information with the vigour he recommends, the fact remains that the parents will be left with an impression of the school after such a visit.

The foregoing can be broadly termed "Information from schools". At least as important is "Information about schools", that is emanating from outwith the education system. In America, schools are funded directly (in most areas) by a state levy, essentially a tax of so many cents per dollar. The level of taxation is fixed by a school budget plebiscite. Inevitably, given the immediate and contentious nature of such referenda, coverage and debate is wide ranging. It is the nature of this forum which is interesting. Hamilton and Cohen (1974) report that the most used source of school information is television. The city of Oakland, California, is slightly smaller than Edinburgh, yet has twelve local television stations. BBC Scotland and Scottish Television cater for a population approximately ten times the size of that of Oakland. Thus it is highly unlikely that school issues, let alone individual schools receive much coverage. It is more likely that a school would be

featured in a negative way, perhaps highlighting a drugs or violence problem. "Good" news coverage is unlikely.

While television in Scotland has no real part to play in the dissemination of information about schools, the local press is in a somewhat different position. Most communities have a local paper of some kind. These can range from a morning or evening daily such as the Edinburgh Evening News, a paid for weekly such as the Lothian Courier, to freesheets and community newsletters. Each of the publications is likely to feature educational news. It is, of course, likely that schools in smaller communities will feature more than those in a city, but within each city there is likely to be a variety of newspapers with smaller and smaller areas of interest. Of the 26 parents interviewed in the Pilot Study (see Chapter 5) all but one read the local evening paper, the Greenock Telegraph every day. Despite its local nature and its coverage of school issues, however, few of the parents could remember assimilating much other than "scandal" or "trivia". It may well be, therefore, that the press is not an "active" information source in the sense that we have used the term throughout this chapter, since no positive use of newspapers may be made in reaching a decision.

In Chapter 2, Coleman, Kurtz and Metzel's (1966) study of new drug adoption among doctors was discussed. They proposed that some sources would be "information only", (that is insufficient in themselves to promote a decision), while others would be legitimising. The comments above on post-hoc rationalisation would suggest that parents are likely to minimise the actual effect of such information while, in fact, actively seeking confirmation of



the decisions that they have made. The latter position seems more generally tenable.

### School Reputations

It would be idealistic to pretend that all schools are equally "effective", just as it would be to suggest that all departments within a school are of uniformly high quality. A valid measure of school effectiveness is problematic and depends to some extent on the ethos adopted by the assessor. One who valued academic success may rate a school highly, while another who valued pastoral care might not. As seen earlier in this chapter, schools themselves try to produce information which highlights their effectiveness in the areas they have a policy of promoting, but equally, whether information is read and understood is open to question.

Much more likely is that a parent will look to a school's reputation. For parents brought up in the area of the assessed school, the task is relatively simple. They are likely to have absorbed a great deal of fact and fiction regarding all schools in their area over the course of many years. How much of it is likely to be first hand depends on their background, as does the proportion which can be ascribed to fact. Similarly, the former status of a school tends to follow it throughout reorganisations.

For parents moving into an area, or considering a change of school, the problem is more difficult. They have to rely on the experiences of others to "guide" them. Such experiences are likely to be of the subjective sort

mentioned above. Certainly incoming parents may seek factual information, but it may well be that this is passive - used to back up a decision made on the basis of hearsay and reputation.

#### A Summary of the Information Phase

There is no doubt that there are large individual differences in the extent to which people seek out and utilise information. In the context of parental choice, this information can be both factual and hearsay, produced by and written about the school. Information is a vast resource for those who wish to make use of it. The question is, how many do? It should be noted that the ways in which information is used could be crucial in understanding the nature of the decision. Should parents not choose to seek factual information, while this would not affect the validity of constructs of the model since they are, in any case, subjective and individualistic, it would nevertheless lead to a fundamental questioning of the assumptions underlying the politician's view of "informed choice" as a policy making tool, and particularly the view and validity of the market model of school choices.

#### SUMMARY

There are two ways of conceptualising the parental choice decision. The first is to assume that each parent makes a decision. This implies that all choice is active and that the catchment area school is considered on a par with other schools. It is however possible that this conceptualisation is flawed. A second view would be to hold that not all parents enter the decision phase.

For a variety of reasons, many parents may not make an active choice. There may be disruption in their home life, they may fear rejection, or, most importantly, they may not be sufficiently dissatisfied with the catchment area school. In such a case they will make a passive choice for the catchment area school. It has been proposed that this assessment of dissatisfaction - essentially the difference between active and passive choice - should constitute the first stage of the model of parental choice.

Clearly the proportion of any sample of parents who opt to look at schools other than their default option, the catchment area school will vary from area to area. In the previous section, some of the effects of a school's reputation were discussed. Another factor would undoubtedly be the perceived level of dissatisfaction among continuing and prospective parents. A school with a poor reputation is very likely to be deemed unsatisfactory. Clearly in this case satisfaction is subjective and to a large extent individualistic. (There are also likely to be consequences at a group level in that, for example, an examination of the placing request statistics for Edinburgh up to 1985 - the last year of the research - indicates that the numbers of prospective parents who opt for other schools varies indirectly with a subjective assessment of the present and past status and reputation of a school. Thus Royal High School, high status and reputation lost one pupil in 1983, Wester Hailes Education Centre, (at the opposite end of the spectrum) lost no fewer than 92.)

Parents proceeding to the active choice phase will value aspects of education to a greater or lesser extent, and consider that individual schools are similarly variously able to satisfy their wish to have such aspects delivered

to their children. In the decision phase, it is proposed that parents will thus seek to maximise their perceived satisfaction. In terms of a model, they will therefore seek to maximise the force score which is a function of the summed products of valence and instrumentality, moderated by the perceived probability that a request would be granted. This choice is defined as :

$$F_{max} = e(E(V \cdot I))$$

### Postscript

This represents a prospective model. As seen in Chapter 2, a prospective model must be regarded as at best interim. This model is no exception. Clearly as research proceeds, elements of the model will be shown to be flawed and will be superseded. Other elements will be shown to be appropriate and will thus be confirmed. Less easy to foresee are the identity and nature of other models which may be more appropriate. It may well be that just such an alternative model explains better the phenomenon of parental choice. In Chapter 2 some of the areas from which such a model may emerge were mentioned. It would not, however, be appropriate at this stage to construct prospective models from these concepts. However, as noted earlier, information beyond that required to assess an expectancy theory approach will be collected. It seems perfectly justifiable to adopt this circumspection in the light of the stated aim of this study, namely to try to explain parental choice by the most appropriate means.

The following chapter will deal with several of the broad methodological issues central to the research projects, particularly the choice of a

technique suitable to the aims of each of the studies. The second part of the chapter will comprise an introduction to the two areas researched.

## CHAPTER 4

### Overview of the Research and Methodology

Burgess (1984) noted that only rarely does a single methodology satisfy all the demands of a research project. It is far more likely that "multiple strategies" need to be adopted, since differing subject groups, different information requirements and different situations usually require specific approaches. Multiple strategies offer the opportunity to address the central issue from a number of perspectives. Burgess' conception follows on from Denzin's (1970) theory of triangulation, the purpose of which is defined by Kane (1984) as:

*"examining the same data through different strategies in order to verify and strengthen the validity of the research results."*

Denzin (1970) proposes three alternative forms of triangulation :

*"In addition to the use of multiple methods there are at least three other varieties of triangulation. Theoretical triangulation involves the use of several different perspectives in the analysis of the same set of data. Data triangulation attempts to gather observations with multiple sampling strategies [while] investigator triangulation is the use of more than one observer in field situations."*

While concurring with the basic theory of triangulation, Shipman (1981) observes that there are severe practical limitations to implementing a research strategy which fully exploits the benefits of the methodology. Prime

among these is the costs involved in the additional time and researcher effort required. For this reason Shipman views triangulation as a goal which need not be fully attained, the researcher having the professional responsibility to assess how much additional validity is required to satisfy the needs of the research.

Shipman further notes that projects should exploit the existence of any parallel or similar research to provide what is in effect post hoc triangulation.

*"The confidence of the reader in the work depends on such triangulation. If it is not built into the single account, then comparisons with other research in the same area should be made"*

It seems appropriate to label this "external" triangulation.

Silverman (1985) questions the philosophical basis of the theory of triangulation. He takes issue with the view that :

*"triangulation helps to validate findings ... because, by enabling the comparison of a number of accounts, it serves to eliminate bias"*

Silverman points out that in order to accept this view it is necessary to adopt a positivistic stance, in essence that there must be one "correct" answer. Silverman contends that accounts of behaviour and experience are inseparable from their context and cannot be seen as competing. Validation, he contends, is a red herring since accounts complement each other and form a part of an overall context specific and individualistic view of action.

This view seems to have a particular relevance to areas in which competing

researchers or theoretical standpoints are interacting with the same individuals or groups on more than one occasion and perhaps less in the present context. To develop the argument further, in a wider sense, Silverman also seems to be cautioning against the use of one set of set of responses to over-ride others. This point is well made since in order for this to occur it is necessary for the researcher to impose his or her view of the "reality" they expect to find in the situation.

Silverman's strictures notwithstanding, the opportunities afforded by the present research strategy for accomodating the triangulation of the data seem great. The existence of three inter-related studies, each differing in its approach, will allow a measure of cross validation to take place. This is further strengthened by the opportunity to draw on the findings of the three parallel studies mentioned in the introduction. Thus, a clear opportunity exists for both internal and external triangulation to take place.

The following sections will describe the strategy to be adopted first in general terms and then more specifically in the context of a review of some of the methodological issues pertinent to the research.

#### Outline of the Research Strategy

Just as it is customary practice, and good sense, for a manufacturer to do both market research and a small test launch of all new products in order to gauge likely demand for the product in the market place, so it makes similar good sense for a researcher to attempt to assess the worth of each aspect of a research project prior to making irreversible decisions on content,



samples and so on. This was the basic reason for the Pilot Study. Moser and Kalton (1965) go as far as to suggest that a Pilot Study is the key to a successful research project.

A pilot study was doubly necessary in the present research, since, given that parental choice of school was a new concept to parents at the time of research, it may well have proved to be a barren study area. Thus the salience of parental choice as an issue had to be established. Additionally, it seemed prudent to establish directly the relevance of psychological decision theory in the specific context of parental choice. These were the initial considerations of the Pilot Study.

Having established the salience of the issue of choice to parents, there would then be justification for proceeding to examine the area in depth. In order to assess how best to accomplish this, it was necessary to review the requirements of the descriptive elements, and of the model. The former, broadly, would demand a detailed appraisal of values, justifications and perceptions, while the latter would require a substantial body of numerical information detailing the valences, instrumentalities and expectancies, assessment of the thresholds and criterion variables. It will be readily apparent that the divergent demands of the two aims of the research would require differing strategies to adequately serve their information needs. It was decided that the qualitative needs of the former would best be met through detailed interviews, while the more quantitative demands of the latter would require larger scale survey methods.

## Methodological Issues

### 1. Face to Face Interviewing

Firstly, in relation to the qualitative information sought both in the Pilot Study and in the first of the two main studies, it was necessary to identify the most fruitful interview method in this context.

There are three basic types of interview, and from these a choice had to be made. These vary in the degree to which the researcher imposes his or her will on the direction it may take. Unstructured, or free interviewing equates more readily with everyday conversation than scientific technique (Burgess, 1984). While the researcher has an "agenda" (as opposed to a questionnaire) with a number of topics which should be covered, the order and way in which this is done is not set in advance, and no constraint is placed on the number of tangential explorations which may take place. The second option, semi-structured interviewing, as the name suggests, uses a questionnaire in which the majority of questions are open ended, allowing a degree of flexibility in answering. The balance of power in the interview - equally distributed in the free technique - is tipped firmly towards the researcher. The third technique, structured interviewing, relies mostly on pre-coded and directed questioning with the interviewee very much a subject rather than a true participant.

### Unstructured Interviewing

The widest use of unstructured interviewing occurs in psychiatry, where its flexibility and interaction is clearly ideal for exploring the problems of the patient in a non-threatening, participative fashion. As a technique it is ideal in providing rich and detailed data when depth rather than breadth is required. There are, however, a large number of practical difficulties in using the technique.

First and foremost among them is the time and cost of conducting more than a few interviews. This fact makes the technique almost useless for conducting any large scale surveys. (The institutional setting of the psychiatric ward imposes no such constraints.) Similarly, if the technique is to be properly employed, the researcher must prepare very thoroughly for each interview, since knowledge of the concerns particular to the interviewee is essential to explore fully all the issues central to research. Clearly this would be time consuming. Burgess (1984) characterises the ideal relationship of interviewer to interviewee as :

*"A friend or confidant who shows interest, understanding and sympathy"*

This brings particular problems with regard to scientific objectivity. Almost by definition, the interaction of the two participants is higher than in almost any other type of research, and this can lead to the actions of the interviewer directly influencing the thoughts and responses of the interviewee.

A second key difficulty is in relating the data from one interview to any other since the questions are likely to have been presented in subtly different ways and in widely differing contexts. An adjunct to this is of course that data is almost impossible to code usefully and thus the focus of the research cannot be changed post-hoc.

It would be difficult to present a clear case for the use of unstructured interviews in the present research. Since it was proposed to use a fairly large number of parents, it was unlikely that the practical difficulties, mentioned above, could be overcome. Particularly limiting would be the difficulty of relating the responses of individual parents to those of others, and forward to a model of parental choice.

### Structured Interviewing

Structured interviews represent the opposite end of the continuum. Stacey (1969) offers the following observations :

*"There are certain clear advantages to the structured schedule. It ensures that all respondents have the same questions put to them, and that the same form of words is used in every case. Although it cannot be assumed that every respondent will understand the same thing by the questions, it does reduce the differences which result from the varied use of words."*

That the most prevalent use of structured interviewing is in the large scale social survey industry illustrates both the strengths, as outlined by Stacey (1969), and the limitations. Opinion polls require a standard set of

questions and pre-coded responses to be given to a substantial number of subjects in a short space of time in a manner allowing little scope for inter-interviewer bias. The largest use of a structured questionnaire is the ten yearly census carried out on behalf of the government. In this case, all households in the United Kingdom must be sampled in a single night. Exactly the same information is required of each, and the responses are coded and analysed mechanically.

Questionnaire design for a structured interview is perhaps the key to the whole procedure, since the social interaction, so critical to un- and semi-structured techniques, is minimised. It would be unusual for qualitative data to be collected by such means, since the depth required is rarely achievable. Such a method relies on the "closed" question, one where all acceptable answers are pre-coded and respondents' variations are forced to fit these categories. Generally, a scale is presented, 3, 5 or 7 point, giving the respondent a common measure of "agreement" or "disagreement". Stacey (1969) gives the following, very common, scale :

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Undecided
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

Apparently simple, scales are in fact particularly difficult to construct. The problems lie in two areas. Firstly, it is human nature to tend towards the middle ground, and thus avoid extremes of the scale. There are three possible courses of action to help alleviate this problem. The first is to exhort

respondents to use the extremities of the scale. This approach is adopted by commercial personality inventories. (For example in the introductory sections of the instructions for the completion of Saville and Holdsworth Ltd's "OPQ" personality inventory.) It is difficult to assess whether such an approach succeeds or not. The second is to compress the scale to make the extremes less "extreme". However, this method is rather forced and much valuable information can be lost. The third, and most common method, is to provide one more point at each end of the scale than is actually required. Thus a five point scale can be converted to a seven point scale with the addition of (to use the above example) "very" to points 1 and 5, thus "very strongly agree/disagree". On analysis the responses 1/2 and 6/7 are treated as one category and thus a five point scale is used in analysis. While this is generally successful in attaining its aims, it can nevertheless unfairly load the data towards the extremes, and similarly responses perceiving actual differences between points 1/2 are lost.

Burgess (1984) makes a subtle distinction which illustrates a main problem of structured techniques. He suggests that questions are "answered" rather than "considered, rephrased, discussed or analysed". The flexibility which would encourage such thought processes is not present in the technique. Thus it is far more likely that "off the cuff" answers are given.

A further problem is that the pre-coding of the questions is likely to be carried out in accordance with the view of the study area adopted by the researcher, and thus the technique may be open to abuse, either intentionally or unintentionally. The most obvious examples of this are the frequent accusation of bias and "loaded questions" in opinion and market research

surveys. While the problem is less likely to be so overt in scientific research this is nevertheless an area to which researchers must pay careful attention.

In the context of the present research, the structured interview had some attractions, particularly in its ability to approach a wide range of, in this case, parents, asking essentially the same questions of each with the attendant benefits of standardisation and comparability. However, there was no reason to suspect that such information could not be more economically gathered in a separate study using a "proxy" structured interview - a postal survey.

#### Semi-structured Interviews

In the spectrum of face to face interviews, the semi-structured technique occupies almost all the ground on the continuum between unstructured and fully structured interviewing. The level to which an interview may be structured can vary from almost total to almost not at all, thus combining the advantages of both of the "extreme" methods while overcoming many of the disadvantages.

A semi-structured interview would typically call for more of an informal setting than a structured, but less detailed preparation on an individual basis than unstructured. An interviewer would follow a list of topics in a more or less set fashion. However, the essential difference lies in the types of question asked. While structured interviewing requires structured (or closed) questions, semi-structured interviewing offers more flexibility

for the inclusion of open-ended probing questions, and particularly, for follow-up questions dictated by previous responses. There is of course a role for closed questions as well, but the question type may be dictated by the type of information required.

Moser and Kalton (1971) identify two main question areas, factual and opinion. Within the former category are such as biographical and general classification data. Such data lends itself to closed questions and this would be their most common use in a semi-structured technique. The latter category, opinion questions, are likely to require to probe more widely and are therefore best served by open ended or structured plus supplementary question techniques.

In the context of the present research a semi-structured technique seemed to offer the ideal method in face to face interviewing. Those questions which needed to be closed in order to make cross persons comparisons could be combined with exploratory questions probing the background and justifications for decisions. Similarly, a measure of factual and biographical data was required of each respondent, and this method had sufficient flexibility to allow for the inclusion of a closed question technique for this purpose. Both the Pilot and Second Studies - interview based - were therefore carried out using a semi-structured technique.

#### Information for the Expectancy Model

The requirements of the expectancy model, and thus the information requirements for the Third Study, in contrast to the two preceding pieces of



research, were felt to be best met by a more structured procedure, the reasons for which will be outlined below. To recap, it was necessary here that parents' constructs be assessed in exactly the same way. Also, a substantial number of parents had to be addressed at, or as close as possible to, the same time in the decision process in order to ensure standardisation. The practical difficulties of making such approaches by interview were seen to be so large as to outweigh any advantages brought by the ability to clarify and elaborate. For this reason, the postal survey provided a useful, if problematic, alternative.

## 2. Postal Surveys

Of all the methods discussed in this chapter, perhaps the most fraught is the postal survey. In its ideal form it can be a quick, cost-effective method of gathering a large pool of data, although with less than perfect preparation it can prove to be frustrating and expensive.

The prime problem with a postal survey is in persuading respondents firstly to open, secondly to fill in and thirdly to return the questionnaire. Response rates can vary almost completely between nil and one hundred percent. There are, however, a number of actions which can help to increase response rates.

While little can be done to persuade respondents to open mail, nevertheless their first impression thereafter can be crucial. It is important to present a professional but simple appeal, free from jargon or hyperbole. Goode and Hatt (1952) identify five key areas which should be covered in any appeal. Firstly, it is important to inform the reader of the "auspices" of the study,

the sponsoring agency or identity of the researcher. Secondly, the purpose of the study should be clearly but simply delineated with no ambiguity. Thirdly, the part played by the respondent in the study should be explained - essentially why he or she should fill in the questionnaire. Goode and Hatt suggest that the most successful approach is "altruistic", explaining that science or knowledge will be advanced. They suggest that this is more effective than any financial inducement, and would appear to have the side benefit of provoking more considered answers.

A fourth crucial aspect of any covering appeal is clear, concise directions as to the completion of the questionnaire. Goode and Hatt suggest that most novice questionnaire designers overestimate the literacy of their target group. A subsidiary point is that even persons of higher educational attainment are unlikely to give the instructions full attention and thus any action which is not readily obvious will be misunderstood by a proportion of respondents, however accomplished.

The final aspect of any appeal is a guarantee of anonymity. While it is unproven whether anonymous responses are more or less candid than those more readily attributable, Goode and Hatt propose that much higher response rates will be found if such a guarantee is offered.

The length of the questionnaire requires a delicate balance to be struck between the information needs of the research and the diminishing returns of people daunted, too busy or disinterested by a long questionnaire. Wherever possible, questionnaires should be shorter rather than longer.

It is unrealistic to expect that respondents will take much trouble over returning a questionnaire and thus this process should be facilitated in any way possible. Pre-addressed and stamped (where appropriate) return envelopes represent an absolute requirement.

The main action to facilitate return of questionnaires is likely to be careful targetting. Respondents who are likely to be interested in the topic of the questionnaire, those for whom the issue is salient, are more likely to return the questionnaire than those with no interest. Thus in the context of the present research it would have been absurd to mail a questionnaire to a group of persons extracted from the electoral roll.

While the drawbacks of a mailed questionnaire are broadly similar to those of the structured interview, the present research attempted to overcome these problems by using essentially a "structured plus supplementary" question design. Thus, the majority of the questionnaire consisted of closed questions, those which were felt to be essential to the needs of the research. However, a number of questions contained supplementary sections seeking *additional* information. It was acknowledged that it was perfectly likely that most respondents would fill in only the closed questions, but it was equally likely that a substantial minority would provide additional information. The tight targetting of the sample made it likely that a relatively high proportion of questionnaires would be returned.

The purpose of the mailed questionnaire in the present research would therefore be to investigate, with restricted depth, but some breadth, the issues arising out of the main interview study, in order to assess both

replication and generalisability of its findings, a use supported by Goode and Hatt (1952) in their summary of the mailed questionnaire technique :

*"The (mailed) questionnaire does not allow complex probe questions which require the respondent to thread his way through many levels of subquestions. Further, the interviewer is not there to give emotional support and other stimuli to increase the respondent's willingness and ability to answer. The questionnaire can most fruitfully be used for highly select respondents with a strong interest in the subject matter... "*

Thus, the overall strategy of the present research was to use two distinct methods in the context of three different approaches : the semi-structured interview based Pilot and Second Studies and the postal survey based Third Study.

### Sampling

The two main social science techniques, face to face interviewing and postal surveys, described earlier in the chapter, both require that sampling be carefully considered.

Tversky's heuristic "representativeness" (Tversky, 1972) would suggest that human beings are likely to ascribe general credence to instances and events happening to few people, but people who are among their immediate circle. Thus children growing up assume that all adults behave in the same ways as their parents, often with unfortunate consequences. Essentially the same problem can be seen in racial stereotypes and ultimately prejudice.

Clearly social science research is often concerned with trends and generalisations among whole populations or sub-groups of populations, and thus, if credence is to be placed on the observations, there must be satisfaction that the group or groups studied are representative of the general population about whom the generalisation is to be made.

This can be achieved in a number of ways. The first, but ultimately least practical is to approach every member of the population under study. Clearly the resources required for such a survey would only be at the command of the government. Large scale social surveys have been conducted, most notably the longitudinal studies of children reported by Douglas. (1964,1968.) More recently the Youth Cohort studies have attempted to attain broadly similar goals with rather older children, but such surveys are rare. Modern opinion polls are of course social surveys, but, despite claims to the contrary, serious doubts must be cast on the representativeness of samples of 1 : 20000, particularly in political issues.

The notion of a control group is at the heart of scientific research, although less so in social science. Essentially the sample for study is divided into two or more groups randomly allocated. The first group is given the experimental condition and any changes are observed. The second group is monitored for random, developmental or other changes which cannot be ascribed to the experiment. There seemed to be little benefit from utilising a control group in the present research since there was no suspicion that the experiment per se would lead to any parent doing anything other than that which they would have done without questioning.

Most social surveys rely on sub-samples of a population rather smaller than those mentioned above. There are two main means of sampling from among a population called by Stacey (1969) "random" and "judgemental" sampling. By the former, every subject has an equal chance of selection for study. This is not to say that this should be done in a haphazard fashion. Random sampling should be statistically based in order to minimise any suggestion of error and bias. Thus it is important to ensure that all elements of a population are represented in broadly accurate proportions, for example, women or minority ethnic groups, if the conclusions are to be described as applicable to a group including them.

Judgemental sampling is a little more complex in that it requires the researcher to exercise discretion over the area to be studied. There is little question that the choice of schools for the present research was a judgemental sample. Schools were chosen on the basis of a number of aspects and variables of location, previous choice histories and so on. Ultimately, however, the justification for the choice of schools rested with the researcher. The nature of the sampling techniques employed within the three studies would be expected to be rather less judgemental. Clearly, if sufficient respondents were forthcoming, it would be necessary to choose among them.

Several issues seemed potentially important in designing a sampling frame for parental choice. The first was to ensure that a suitably balanced mix of target schools was attained. It would have been pointless to interview a large number of parents from a single primary school with correspondingly fewer of any others. Similarly, should it have transpired that there were

demographic differences among sub samples, clearly these should have been properly represented. Most crucial, however, was the need to carry out any sampling on a properly randomised basis within those sub groups in order that no experimenter bias be attributed to pre-screening of the respondents in any systematic, and thus invalid way.

### Questionnaire Design

The final pertinent methodological issue which had to be addressed was that of questionnaire design, without doubt one of a large number of apparently simple tasks which is nevertheless fraught for the unwary, and much more complex than it might appear. In its widest sense, a questionnaire is any aggregation of questions whether written or oral, pre-ordained or extemporised. However, this definition is rather too wide to fully explain the importance of correct questionnaire design to a research project. Moser (1961) makes the point that no survey is better than its questionnaire.

As there are different methods of gathering research information, so those where a questionnaire would be appropriate require subtly different designs in order that the maximum information be extracted in a fair and straightforward way. Thus, a face to face interview would require different sorts of questions from a mailed survey, and even within the spectrum of interviews, for example, fully and semi-structured interviews require differing emphases. The actual requirements of each of the techniques as they relate to each study will be discussed in the relevant chapters, but it

seems appropriate here to offer some observations on general design principles.

Clearly the first task of a researcher is to establish the correct type of questionnaire required, and, as noted, this is dictated by the research methodology. The basic questions which need to be addressed are :

1. Will any approach be face to face or mailed?
2. Within a face to face design, how directed should the interview be?
3. Is the aim of the questionnaire to produce information which is qualitative or quantitative?

Each of these three basic questions produces an indication of the sort of questionnaire required. In the context of the present research, these questions produced different answers for each of the three studies. For example, while the Pilot and Second studies were face to face, the Third Study was mailed. The questionnaires used as a result of reviewing these questions differed in both form and content, depending on their purposes. Each will be fully described in the relevant chapters.

The third of these questions is particularly significant. Many research projects change direction midway through fieldwork or even in the analysis phase by attempting to graft a quantitative structure onto a qualitative database. Such an approach is generally unsatisfactory since the "researcher effect" is inevitably higher as the categorisations are generally arrived at with the benefit of post-hoc rationalisation, and the data itself usually requires the skill of a contortionist to be made to fit any categories, at least in a truly meaningful way. In reverse, of course, the same can apply. The researcher vainly scans rough notes to try to "remember" quotes and



other back and foreground information not collected directly at the time. Thus it is crucial that the analytical phase of the research project be planned, at least in outline, before any questionnaire design takes place.

In the present research, the Pilot and Second studies were mostly qualitative while the Third, although avowedly quantitative in serving the information demands of the theoretical model nevertheless contained optional questions which, if answered, would produce qualitative data.

### Construction

Probably the most stringently tested and controlled questionnaires are those used for psychometric tests. While the detail of the process of designing such a questionnaire is perhaps excessively stringent for a research project, nevertheless an outline of the basic principles would seem useful.

The underlying *sine qua non* of test design is that all questions are simple, straightforward and not capable of misinterpretation. See, for example, Cronbach (1961) or Anastasi (1969). While this is most readily achieved by the correct use of language, the structure of the questionnaire can also contribute to clarity. It is useful to group questions around common subject areas avoiding the necessity for sudden changes in direction of thought on the part of the interviewee. Bearing these points in mind, the first stage would be to build up a bank of questions, often with more than one addressing the same underlying theme. Generally many more than will be finally required will be used. Each question should be analysed for evidence that it has been misunderstood - perhaps by widely differing answers being

offered by people whom one would clearly expect to answer more similarly. A second approach to this problem, particularly for quantitative designs is to calculate intercorrelation of items to establish more clearly what is being measured by each. A third, and no less important source of such information, is the subjective perceptions of interviewers, or the researcher him or herself as to the ease or difficulty with which subjects have coped with individual questions, ideas or sections.

Such were the considerations of the design of the tools for the research. The final methodological decisions which had to be made related to which specific geographical areas to study. The final part of this chapter will detail the reasons for the selection of the particular schools examined.

### The Study Areas

As was clearly demonstrated in Chapter 1, the take-up of parental choice varied across the country, being higher in cities than in rural areas. However, there were also areas in which distinctive local patterns emerged. The choice of area to study had to be somewhat arbitrary, but nonetheless the presence of a number of conditions would facilitate successful research.

First among these would be a history of choice in the area. The Pilot Study was carried out in May 1982, the first year of implementation of the legislation, and thus only expected choice patterns under the new legislation could be used, but it will be recalled that all local authorities had operated exceptional admissions schemes prior to the implementation of Section 28 of the Education Act and thus choices had been made, if under different restraints. The Second and Third Studies, conducted in 1983 and 1984 were planned using request data from 1982 and 1983.

Secondly, in order to fully investigate choices particularly using the dissatisfaction components of the model, the presence of a school losing, or expected to lose a significant proportion of pupils would be essential. As a corollary, in order to facilitate analysis of choice of alternative school, movement would ideally be confined to a small number of adjacent schools.

Thirdly, as (Adler and Raab, 1987) subsequently demonstrated, choice behaviour in certain areas can be shown to have been a consequence of purely geographical factors such as road safety or primary school zoning. In order

to fully utilise the expectancy model, it was essential to study areas in which a multiplicity of choice justifications would be anticipated. In the absence of data setting out the justifications of those moving in the past, the views of local education officials were central to the identification of such areas.

### The Pilot Study

Although exceptional admissions had been permitted in all regions prior to 1981 (Chapter 1), data on the levels of, and schools affected by, such movements were not generally made public, and thus a subjective list of likely locations was prepared prior to approaching the relevant local authority for guidance and subsequent access. The list included a number of medium sized Scottish towns.

Education officials confirmed that Greenock fulfilled each of the three criteria listed above. Prior to 1982, significant movements had taken place within the town, centring on two losing and two gaining schools, and for reasons perceived by the officials to be diverse and not merely geographical.

### The Pilot Study Area

Greenock was a former heavily industrialised town. Its main employers, the shipyards, were in severe decline and other established firms, such as Tate and Lyle, merely shells of once booming factories. To an extent, this de-industrialisation had been offset by the establishment of a concentration of electronics firms in the Spango Valley area of the town, with IBM the main

employer. Socially the town was divided. In the east, there were large housing estates, one of which, Gibbshill, was an area of multiple deprivation. In contrast, the west end of the town (and the contiguous town of Courock) were prosperous.

The second part of the Pilot Study area centered on the village of "Kennox" to the south of Greenock, accessible both by an improved road and by electric train. Although attracting many passengers in transit to the holiday resorts of the Clyde Coast, the village had few amenities beyond shops and an hotel. Local employment was provided, however, by a local power station operated by the South of Scotland Electricity Board, then still fully operational on the northern outskirts of the village. In the previous decade the electrification of the railway line had made commuting to Glasgow attractive, and as a consequence of this, two relatively large housing estates were begun. One was a private development, the other built for let by the Scottish Special Housing Association. Although harmony was claimed by the local Headteacher, several parents saw an "us and them" attitude as prevalent.

#### Educational Provision In Greenock

Educational provision was through seven local secondary schools, of which five were pertinent to the study area. Limeyards Academy was formerly one of the "first division" of Scottish schools, in rather the same position as the Sheriffyards High School in Edinburgh (central to the Second and Third studies). Limeyards High School was formerly a senior secondary, a large

modern school very close to the towns most prestigious employer, a US based computer manufacturer. Bedlay High School was formerly a Junior secondary situated in the south of the town, being relatively small with around 600 pupils. As with most areas of the West of Scotland, there was a flourishing Catholic population, for whom educational provision was by means of two schools, Blairhall and Brucefield, former senior and Junior secondary schools respectively. It should be explained at this stage that Catholic parents were functionally in two catchment areas, catholic and also non-denominational.

#### Patterns of Choice

Due to the early closing date for placing request applications in Strathclyde (15th January 1982, rather than the suggested mid-February), the actual requests made for 1982/83 were available on which to base research decisions.

Table 4.1 Placing Requests 1982/83

School	Gain	Loss
Blairhall	8	0
Brucefield	1	7
Limeylands Academy	11	1
Limeylands High	0	17
Tynemount High	5	2
Bedlay High	5	1
Riddochhill High	4	2
(Others)		(4)
	-----	-----
	34	34

Not included in Table 4.1 are the effects of "dual catchment" area movements, those leaving Catholic primary schools for non-denominational secondary schools for whom no formal placing request need be made. Table 4.2 clearly illustrates the changes.

Table 4.2 Dual Catchment Area Movements 1982/83

School	Gain	Loss
Bucefield	0 (1)	11 (18)
Limeylands Academy	11 (22)	0 (1)

n.b. Overall totals in brackets.

The above tables clearly illustrate the presence of two gaining and two losing schools, the former Limeylands Academy and Blairhall, the latter, Brucefield and Limeylands High school. Blairhall gained only from other Catholic schools and thus was somewhat different from Limeylands Academy which gained from five schools across both systems. As both Limeylands High and Brucefield lost heavily to Limeylands Academy, it was decided to study primary schools within these two catchment areas. Patterns of choice at three seemed particularly interesting.

#### a. Kennox Primary School

Situated six miles south of the town, the school was zoned for Limeylands High School, but approximately equidistant from both this and Limeylands Academy. Despite this, the school could be described as "loyal", since 82% of transfers were to its catchment area schools (four to Blairhall RC High School). Given the patterns of movement illustrated within the two schools

this is perhaps surprising, and thus worthy of further investigation. Four of the placing requests made were for Limeylands Academy and thus some parents may be shown to be dissatisfied or have particular reasons for choice.

The school itself was modern and largely open-plan, serving both halves of the village educationally, and as a centre for social activities. It was viewed as progressive both by its Headteacher and parents.

#### b. Leadside Primary School

Situated in the prosperous west end of the town, the school was zoned for Brucefield Roman Catholic High School, but its catchment area contained Limeylands Academy. Only 8 out of 25 pupils in 1982/83 transferred to Brucefield. Six parents made placing requests for Blairhall RC while eleven opted out of the denominational system to attend Limeylands Academy. Thus Leadside could be portrayed as "disloyal" in that only 32% of pupils transferred to its catchment area school. Clearly this school was of particular interest with the catholic/non-denominational issue as well as those raised by the presence of high gain/high loss schools.

The school was located in poor facilities dating from the turn of the century. Despite this, both the school and the Headteacher were well regarded by parents and officials, if not always by local priests. The role of Headteachers and priests in Catholic education is far stronger than could be expected from non-catholic counterparts.



### c. Blackrigg Primary School

Situated to the south of the town centre, this school was within a dual catchment area, half of its pupils attending Bedlay, half Limeylands. It would be expected that a fair amount of movement would take place across this artificial boundary, but in fact only 11% of parents made placing requests concerning either of the two schools.

The school was large and ill-equipped, situated on a main road which was a clear road safety hazard. Nevertheless, it was perceived to be popular, and was, once again, a social centre for its community.

### Overview of the Pilot Study Area

Thus three contrasting primary schools were chosen from within the town of Greenock and satellite villages. Each offered differing opportunities for study. However, most importantly, it seemed likely that the salience of parental choice as an issue would become clear here. An account of the findings of the Pilot Study will form Chapter 5, and therein the sampling frames, questionnaires and subsequent analysis will be described.

### The Second and Third Studies

The choice of study area (or areas) for the subsequent research was driven by slightly different concerns from those of the Pilot Study. Principal among these was the requirement for larger sample sizes than could be offered by even a medium sized town such as Greenock. It was thus likely that only a

city could provide such an opportunity. Permission was obtained to conduct research within the City of Edinburgh, which, it will be recalled, had the second highest incidence of placing requests in Scotland (behind Dundee).

#### The Edinburgh Division

Lothian Region was educationally divided into four divisions corresponding to the District Council areas. The three "Lothians" were predominantly rural and thus take up of placing requests was relatively low (except for Livingston New Town in West Lothian). The fourth division, Edinburgh City, was mostly urban, although there were two essentially rural schools at Balerno and South Queensferry. As noted in Chapter 1, in 1983/84, take up at S1 (the age group involved in this research) reached 22.5%. This represented more than 1 in 5 of all transfers.

Edinburgh was a city of a little under half a million people, generally prosperous, a major financial centre and yet, on its periphery, possessing some of the worst housing estates in Scotland - urban deprivation on a vast scale in areas such as Muirhouse, Craigmillar and Wester Hailes. Each of these estates had an identifiable local school.

In such a city of contrasts the comprehensive school system sat rather uneasily. As well as former fee paying schools, several of the old senior secondaries still existed, as did most of the junior secondaries. (The situation was further complicated by the relocations of two, one a former fee paying in 1968, the other a former senior secondary, in 1972). The

differential status of these schools was crucial to understanding movement in the city.

The Edinburgh Division had 24 secondary schools, of which 3 were Catholic and 2 (Balerno and South Queensferry) in rural areas outwith the old city boundary. Leaving these five aside there are 19 which will now be analysed in detail (using placing request data from August 1983 on which research decisions were based).

#### A Typology

In studying the movements in and out of Edinburgh schools, four broad categories were apparent viz :

Gain - These schools gain a moderate to high number while losing few;

Loss - These schools lose a moderate to high number while gaining few;

Balance - These schools gain and lose a moderate to high number;

Stable - These schools gain and lose few pupils.

The raw figures for the 21 non-denominational city schools were as follows :

Table 4.3 Patterns of Choice in Edinburgh 1983/84

School	Gain	Lose	Net	Category
Solsgirth	5	76	-71	Lose
Comrie	1	6	-5	Stable
Seafeld	37	41	-4	Balance
Fleets	64	30	+34	Gain
Polmalse	5	84	-79	Lose
Policies	14	22	-8	Balance
Foulshields	26	44	-18	Lose-Balance
Kinnell	6	30	-24	Lose
Rigfoot	24	16	+8	Balance
Sorn	47	18	+29	Gain
Killoch	37	24	+13	Balance
Michael	8	27	-19	Lose
Monktonhall	74	14	+60	Gain
Mortonmuir	40	20	+20	Gain-Balance
Redding	36	9	+27	Gain
Knockshinnoch	76	12	+64	Gain
Francis	0	1	-1	Stable
Sheriffyards	81	1	+80	Gain
Shieldmains	22	41	-19	Lose-Balance
Lady Nina	44	27	+17	Balance
Lady Victoria	4	92	-88	Lose

#### Possible Factors In Movements

Clearly from the table there were examples of all four categories among Edinburgh city schools. The fourth (stable) was represented by the out of town schools, viz Comrie and Francis. This category was almost by definition of little interest for this research. Each of the three remaining categories will be dealt with in turn.

a. Gaining Schools : Among gaining schools there appeared to be two distinct sub-groups, firstly those who may have gained on their own merits, and those who gained thanks to other factors. In the former group were Sheriffyards and Monktonhall. Both were high status schools in middle class areas gaining from a wide range of other schools over the whole of the city. In the latter

group were Knockshinnoch, Sorn and Redding. In this group there were two possible reasons for gain. For the first two named schools, many of the children came from one school only (Polmalse and Solsgirth respectively) and it was most likely that parents, in placing their children in these schools were avoiding the others. The latter two schools were perhaps best explained by geographical factors. Sorn gained the majority of its pupils from Kinnell thanks to primary school zoning which did not accord with perceptions in the local area, and likewise Redding gained from Michael (and perhaps also to an extent from avoidance of Polmalse).

b. Balance Schools : Of the balance schools, perhaps the most interesting is Seafeld. A former senior secondary, it would intuitively have been expected to be a "gain" school, and it did gain from primaries all over the city (12 in all) and yet it also lost heavily to Monktonhall. Clearly Boroughmuir was an intermediate status school - seen as high by parents moving to it, but as low by those opting for Monktonhall, another school with high status. (Part of the loss can also be explained by eccentric catchment areas dating from a time when it was proposed to move the school to a new site in the east of the town).

Shieldmains seemed to be, in a sense, caught in the same no-man's-land as Seafeld. Again a former senior secondary it gained from a number of its neighbours but lost to Mortonmuir, a similar school historically, but one with a high residual reputation among indigenous residents.

c. Losing Schools : Perhaps most interesting of all were the losing schools, and particularly Polmalse, Solsgirth (with to an extent Foulshieles) and Lady

Victoria. Each of these schools served, at least in a large part, a housing estate catchment in an area of severe deprivation. (Foulshieles could be regarded as a losing school since its gains were at the expense of Solsgirth in an area where the catchment area boundaries did not accord with local perceptions of geography). Since each of the schools lost to a minimum of six other schools, it would be difficult to suggest that the losses were due to the attractiveness of the receiving schools. Rather it would make sense to suggest that the losses were due to parents seeking to avoid these schools, or the areas they served.

Thus, it can be clearly seen that within Edinburgh there were a number of schools which could form the focus of the research. Each of the high loss schools fulfilled all three proposed criteria to be used in choosing a study area (see above). However, one in particular further offered a neighbouring school which itself had an interesting pattern of choice in gaining from and losing to a number of other schools. Thus the "Solsgirth" High School catchment area was selected as the principle area for study.

#### Educational Provision in the Study Area

In November 1983, Lothian Region Education Department issued a series of consultative papers on the future of education in the city. Faced with the need to cut expenditure, the papers focussed on the contribution which could be made to this exercise by rationalising school places in the light of

falling school rolls. Since Solsgirth was at the centre of these proposals, and they had a large effect on the study itself, it is worthwhile examining the proposals in some depth.

The papers considered in detail six proposals for school reorganisation in the present study area. The schools involved were Sheriffyards, Foulshiels, Solsgirth, Shieldmains, Mortonmuir, Rigfoot and Fleets. Of these schools, Sheriffyards was seriously overcrowded, but Foulshiels, Solsgirth and Rigfoot were each projected to fall below the level of viability set by the Director of Education for Lothian Region (500 pupils in 1990). Both Mortonmuir and Shieldmains Academies were contained in unsatisfactory buildings, including annexes which the Director was anxious to have vacated. Of the schools, only Fleets seemed to be free of administrative problems. Of particular relevance were proposals 4 and 6 dealing with the closure of Solsgirth.

Solsgirth had been opened as a junior school in 1953 with a working capacity of 1450. At the time of the report the roll was 774 but this was projected to fall to 440 by 1990, due mainly to declining birth rates and the effects of parental choice. The report considered Solsgirth's accommodation to be "fair" - a designation contested by staff and parents (and difficult to understand on personal inspection, especially in the light of the designation of Foulshiels, apparently in much worse repair, as "good"). At no stage in the report was the quality of teaching or the educational provision at Solsgirth criticised in any way. The report made, and rejected, various administrative solutions to halt the decline in Solsgirth's roll, mostly by rezoning primary schools, but it was felt that the provisions of the Education (Scotland) Act 1981 would nullify these changes.

In summing up, the report recommended that one of the options including the closure of Solsgirth be adopted by the Education Committee. It was felt that time for consultation should be allowed, however, and that the "final" decision on the future of Solsgirth was not to be taken until a special meeting of the Education Committee on 12th April 1984.

In the interim, staff, parents and councillors mounted a campaign against the closure of the school. A special booklet was produced and a number of submissions made to the Education Committee. At a public meeting (organised by the Region) a senior member of the Education Department and a representative of the Conservative Party were strongly criticised. However, the juxtaposition of education professionals and the lay parent group meant that many of the parents' arguments were not followed through as they may have been in other circumstances.

In his report on the consultation, the Director of Education rejected all the points made by the parties interested in the future of Solsgirth and reiterated his position that the closure of the school should form a central part of the restructuring of education in the area. At the special meeting of the Education Committee, the Conservatives moved a motion to that effect. The motion was defeated and an amendment instructing the Director to reassess the provision of education at Solsgirth was approved. Certainly, there was an element of political expediency involved, given that most of the area was staunchly Labour and one of the three Alliance Party's Regional Council members' constituencies included a large part of the Solsgirth catchment area. The decision, while a reprieve, left the school in a sort of



limbo, and was not viewed with much satisfaction in the area, the general feeling being that the "end had to come".

As will be shown in the relevant chapter, the closure threat had some bearing on the results of the Second Study. Interviews were carried out during the consultation period, and thus the decision to reprove the school was still four months in the future. However, by the time of the Third Study, the resolution of the situation in favour of keeping the school open meant that the issue had no bearing on the Third Study.

The second secondary school involved in the research was Fleets High School. A former senior secondary, it was relocated from a site to the east of the city (subsequently occupied by Fleets Primary) to a suburban location in the north of the city in 1972. The school was newer, and more modern than Solsgirth, and had the added advantage of housing the Region's Music Unit, a specialist teaching facility for the subject, and the only one in the Region. Built with a working capacity of 1650, its roll as of 1983 was 1189. In the aforementioned discussion paper, it was envisaged that the roll would remain high, partly through the effects of parental choice and partly through primary school rezoning. (Since then, Fortacres Primary has been rezoned to the Sherliffyards School. However this would have little effect since only a minority of the children from that area actually attended Fleets on transfer anyway.)

Thus the two secondary schools involved were somewhat contrasting, both in history - one a former senior secondary, one a junior secondary; one high

status, the other low status; one with bright prospects, the other's future uncertain.

### Primary Provision

In this section only the primary schools involved in the research will be considered. (There are two other primary feeders to each of the secondary schools not involved). Thus the primaries were as follows :

#### Solsgirth

Cardowan  
Gartshore  
Bardykes

#### Fleets

Burghlea  
Fortacres  
Fleets

A fourth Solsgirth feeder school was also considered. Situated in the worst of the area's urban deprivation which was then being renovated, the roll of the school was considered likely to expand as property was reoccupied. At the time of the research the school was in the Solsgirth catchment area. However, this seemed to be an administrative convenience given that the area was physically and socially separate from Solsgirth. In the minds of the residents there was no connection at all, and thus the majority of the movement could, according to the local Headteacher be ascribed to purely geographical factors. For this reason it was decided not to proceed with this fourth school.

The catchment area of Solsgirth was split into two distinct parts. The first (which included the Solsgirth building) was served by two primary schools,

Cardowan and Gartshore. Built in the 1930s along with the majority of the local housing, both schools were essentially identical, barely 400 yards apart on the same street. The third Solsgirth feeder primary school involved in the research was Bardykes. Situated in the second part of the catchment area around one mile from the secondary school, the school was an amalgamation of two former primaries, brought about by the destruction of one by fire in 1982. The secondary catchment area retained the old Foulshiel - Solsgirth split and thus the part of the area remained within the Solsgirth catchment area and so of interest here.

As noted above, subsequent to the research one of the Fleets feeder primaries, Fortacres, was transferred to the Sheriffyards catchment area. However, this was only a proposal at the time of the research, and had no bearing on it. The school itself was new, and in a rapidly expanding area of expensive properties. Burghlea primary was a large school, and covered a very large catchment area. It was unfavourably situated beside a busy roundabout. The final primary school, Fleets, was housed in the former secondary school building and was almost two miles, and two buses, from the Fettes site. Its catchment area included Rigfoot High School, and several of the proposals in the discussion paper had suggested the rezoning of the school.

#### Patterns of Choice in the Study Area

##### a. Solsgirth

Dealing first with the patterns of choice at primary schools selected for study, the possible transfer to Solsgirth from the three primaries was 128,

and in the event 84 started there in August 1983, while 44 made placing requests to go elsewhere. (66%/34%). These destinations were split as follows

Primary School	Destination	Number	%age
Bardykes (East)	Solsgirth	13	37.4
	Fleets	13	37.4
	Foulshiels	6	16.2
	Shieldmains	1	2.7
	Sheriffyards	2	5.4
	--	35	
Cartshore	Solsgirth	26	60.5
	Fleets	9	20.9
	Foulshiels	2	4.6
	Shieldmains	5	11.6
	Sheriffyards	1	2.3
	--	43	
Cardowan	Solsgirth	45	90.0
	Fleets	2	4.0
	Sheriffyards	1	2.0
	Shieldmains	2	4.0
	--	50	

This ratio of leavers to stayers of 2:1 was contrasted with around 4:1 in Edinburgh as a whole.

It will be seen from the table that the three Solsgirth feeder primaries differed significantly in their destination profiles. Cardowan could be described as a "loyal" school given that some 90% of its pupils transferred to the catchment area secondary. Cartshore could be described as an

Intermediate school with around 60% of pupils transferring. Barmykes, on the other hand, could be described as "disloyal" in that a clear majority of its pupils transferred to schools other than Solsgirrh. The variety was important in finalising the choice of study area since it was expected that parents in each school would have different perspectives on choice and on Solsgirrh.

Solsgirrh itself had a total possible S1 intake of 199. 76 pupils were the subject of placing requests out of the school, while 5 were the subject of placing requests into the school, and thus the net number of pupils who began at S1 in 1983 was 128, or 64%. The placing request destinations were as follows :

a) OUT

Destination	Number	%age
Fleets	31	41
Foulshiel	25	33
Shieldmains	10	13
Sheriffyards	9	12
Mortonmuir	1	1
--		
	76	

b) IN

Previous	Number
Foulshiel	3
Shieldmains	1
(Other)	1
--	
	5

## b. Fleets

Among the Fleets primaries, the following pattern emerged :

Primary	Destination	Number	%age
Fortacres	Fleets	20	45.5
	Sheriffyards	10	22.8
	Fee Paying	14	31.8
	--	44	
Fleets	Fleets	29	59.2
	Rigfoot	15	30.6
	(Others)	2	4.1
	Fee Paying	3	6.1
	--	49	
Burghlea	Fleets	69	97.2
	Sheriffyards	1	1.4
	Fee Paying	1	1.4
	--	71	

The destination profile of Fleets' feeder primary schools was essentially similar to that obtained in Solsgirth, although the overall transfer rate at Fleets (73%) was a little higher (64%). Burghlea is obviously a "loyal" school, Fleets Intermediate and Fortacres "disloyal". (For the purposes of this analysis - which is only descriptive and not intended to be normative - fee paying schools were treated as a single destination.)

Thus of a possible admission of 163 from the three primaries, 118 or 73% in fact started in August 1983. 17 children (10%) moved to private education, and 17% were the subject of placing requests. Discounting those leaving the state system, 81% remained with the catchment area school.

The total possible intake at Fleets was 230. 30 children were the subject of requests out, 23 moved to fee paying schools, while 64 were the subject of requests into the school. The number of children starting S1 was thus 241.

Placing requests were split as follows :

a) IN

Previous	Number	%age
Solsgirth	31	48
Foulshields	4	6
Rigfoot	2	3
Shieldmains	9	14
Others	18	28
	--	
	64	

b) OUT

Sheriffyards	14	47
Rigfoot	12	26
Others	4	13
	--	
	30	

It will be seen from the above table that almost one half of all placing requests into Fleets came from Solsgirth. However, there were none in the opposite direction.

The foregoing has provided a situational context for each of the three studies. While details of approach and questionnaire content will be dealt with in each of the study chapters (5,6 and 7), this has provided an overall review of the means of addressing the research objectives.

## Overview

Having reviewed many of the methodological issues surrounding the research, and set the study areas in context, the next three chapters will, in turn, report in detail the findings of each project. Chapter 5 will contain a brief account of the Pilot Study and its contribution to the subsequent two chapters. The main burden of the experimental review will be carried by Chapters 6 and 7, detailing the second (qualitative) and the third (quantitative) studies. Each will end with a brief conclusion pointing forward to Chapters 8 and 9, in which the twin aims of the research will be reviewed and an overall conclusion offered.



## CHAPTER 5

### The Pilot Study

Having established the need for a Pilot Study (see Chapter 4), it would appear useful at this stage to clearly delineate the aims of this study in order to provide an analytical framework for the findings.

#### Aims

As seen in Chapter 1, prior to 1981 the scale of movement by means of exceptional or out-of-area admissions procedure was limited. While this may have indicated widespread satisfaction with allocations policies, the views of Conservative politicians seemed to suggest that lack of knowledge and, to an extent, apathy among parents meant that few requests were made. In formalising parents' rights to choose an alternative school, Mr Fletcher, the sponsoring Minister, clearly stated that parents would become more likely to make choices as a result of the legislation, it stopped some way short of the logical "end point" of such thinking, (to force all parents to make a choice under a system of open enrolment).

At the time of the implementation of the provisions of Section 28 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1981, it was far from clear whether Mr Fletcher's optimism would prove justified. (University of Glasgow, 1986). The present research commenced in October 1981, the month in which the legislation was enacted. It was prudent, therefore, in the absence of any evidence, to

attempt to assess whether, as Mr Fletcher felt, parents would respond to their new rights positively and in sufficient numbers to justify conducting a full research project.

A parallel aim of the Pilot Study was to assess the relevance of using Expectancy Theory to address the issue of parental choice. As noted in Chapter 2, the face validity of such an approach was intuitively apparent. However, it seemed prudent to establish it more directly.

### Scope of the Pilot Study

The Pilot Study addressed a number of issues relevant to the prospective model of parental choice. Because of the timing of the research, (after decisions had been made by parents), it was impossible to address the predictive model, but aspects of each of its elements were assessed in order to establish whether parents were comfortable in their use. Similarly, it was clear that developing questions to successfully measure parents' instrumentalities, valences and expectancies would be problematic, and the opportunity was afforded by a Pilot Study to try several different means.

### Methodology

The study area and broad methods were introduced in Chapter 4. The following section will describe the more specific details of the method applied to this study. It was decided to approach all the parents in Leadside primary and Kennox primary, and an equivalent number in Blackrigg. Thus 28, 25 and 25 parents in each respective school were approached. The preferred method of

approach was opt- out, whereby parents would have to return the request slip if they did not wish to participate, since it was felt that by this method a higher response rate would be gained.

Interviews were arranged (mostly) by telephone and the venue could be either the interviewee's home, or a room provided by the school, at the interviewee's discretion. (In the event only one parent was interviewed in the school, and in that case only because she had other business in the school at the time.)

Two slightly different questionnaires were used, one for the Catholic and one for the non-denominational samples, the former consisting of forty eight, the latter of forty nine items, several of which contained subsections. The only difference related to a supplementary question on church involvement in Catholic decision making. Sections one and four concerned general demographic and social variables. Questions were included to gauge the degree of involvement of the parents in the education process, their involvement in social activities and their past educational record and achievements.

Section two of the questionnaire was an attempt to quantify the depth of the parents' knowledge of the local education system, and probe their perceptions of the reputations of the local schools. Most importantly, however, it contained attempts to clarify the outcomes the parents held for their children within the education system. In terms of the model, this related to the "valences". These questions were deliberately open ended to allow the parents latitude in their answers and, it was hoped, to prevent the

Imposition of the views of the researcher. It was decided to prompt for several of the most popular outcomes, such as "highers" or "discipline", if necessary. Data were collected in the form of a five point scale.

Section 2 also contained an attempt to quantify the instrumentalities of the model by inviting the parents to rate the schools relative to each other on the likelihood that they would satisfy each of their desired outcomes. This was done by presenting cards with the names of the schools to the parents and asking them to place them on a larger card marked with a five point scale, the position to be determined by their estimation of the likelihood that the school would fulfill the nominated desired outcome. The "expectancies" were contained within section three of the questionnaire, prefaced with an attempt to gauge the level of information held about the rights granted to them by the Education (Scotland) Act 1981. They were invited to describe the current allocation system and that which preceded it under the exceptional admissions procedures. They were asked the sources of their information both about their rights and education in general. At this point parents were asked if they had considered making a placing request, and if so, whether they had in fact done so. Catholic parents were also asked if they foresaw any circumstances whereby they would withdraw their children from the Catholic education system.

The final section consisted of two or three general questions, asking the parents to comment freely on their perception of the current education system, and more specifically on the philosophy behind the provisions of Section 28 of the Education (Scotland) Act. Catholic parents were also asked

their views on the relevance of the denominational system of education as it existed in the West of Scotland.

### Analysis

The first point to note in this analysis is that in fact two of the Headteachers summarily changed the opt-out method previously agreed to opt-in by the inclusion of a tear off slip. This was not done because of any methodological or ethical reservations, but simply because they were trying to help. This did, however, provide a neat, if unscientific, test of the two methods. The responses are noted in the table below.

Table 5.1 Responses by School

School	n	method	rate (%)
Leadside	25	opt out	76
Kennox	28	opt in	50
Blackrigg	25	opt in	36

It would appear therefore that the opt-out method was markedly more successful than the opt-in method (which had a composite success rate of 43%). (As noted, a proper test would have randomly allocated methods within the schools.) One Headteacher suggested that the higher response rate among Catholic parents may have been due to the closer relationship they were perceived to have with their schools, but this was conjecture. These things said, it was clear that an opt-out method was likely to prove more fruitful in later research.

Of forty two possible interviews, in the end some twenty six were finally completed. These were split as follows:

Table 5.2 Interviews by School

School	possible	actual
Leadside	19	11
Kennox	14	12
Blackrigg	9	3

There were several reasons for completing only twenty six of the interviews. In the Blackrigg and Leadsides areas, the higher proportion of working women made arranging interviews somewhat more difficult. In Kennox this was not so prevalent. Further, it was felt that little more would be gained from interviewing more parents, and thus a decision was taken to terminate the pilot study.

Table 5.3 Placing Requests

School	requests	no request
Kennox	3	9
Leadsides	9*	2
Blackrigg	3	0

\*includes 5 "dual area" requests

## Demographic Background to the Sample

### Catholic Sample

As noted above, the Catholic part of the sample was drawn from a relatively small area in the west end of the town. The area was staunchly middle class with ten of the eleven parents groups interviewed being owner occupiers. Five of the men were electrical engineers, the other a mix of professionals. Eight of the women were economically active, four were teachers, and again, all were professionals. All were two parent families. All had been resident for over six years in Inverclyde, none thought moving likely. Nine of the sample claimed to be regular attenders at parents nights, seven being members of the PTA.

### Non - Denominational Sample

The Kennox sub-sample fell into two distinct social groups by housing tenure. However, each of the twelve husbands described themselves as "professional" with engineers again in the majority. More surprisingly, only two of the wives were economically active, perhaps reflecting the lack of opportunity for employment in the village. While all of the sample had been in their current residence for more than two years, five of the sample had lived in Inverclyde for less than five years. Additionally, five of the sample felt it likely that they would move out of the area. Eleven of the sample regularly attended parents nights, six being members of the PTA. The Headteacher encouraged parents to phone him at any time, and several

regularly did so. (None of the four Catholic parents at the school consented to be interviewed.)

The three Blackrigg parents were firmly working class, long resident in the area and regular attenders at parents nights although none were members of the PTA.

### Substantive Knowledge

Analysis of the questions relating to substantive knowledge produced some rather surprising findings. It will be recalled that there were seven schools in the immediate area of Greenock and Courock. Of the Kennox sub sample, only Limeylands Academy and Limeylands High school were known to all, Blairhall to ten, Tynemount Academy to nine, Bedlay to five, Brucefield and Riddochhill to three each. This is rather surprising given the fact that all of the sample had been resident in the area for some time. Following on from this, parents were particularly unsuccessful in assessing the size of the schools they knew of. (The "worst" case was a parent estimating the roll of Limeylands Academy at 1800 - the actual roll was 720.)

An interesting feature to emerge was the consistent over-estimation of the size of Limeylands High School by those parents who had made placing requests away from the school. The average overstatement was in the order of 50%. These same parents all cited the "size" of the school as a main reason for their choice. This may either be a case of choice made on inaccurate information or else evidence of dissonance reduction.



Among these Kennox parents, the question of reputations produced divergent responses. It was not at all surprising that there should be such a difference, given that placing requests had been made. For two of those who had made requests, Limeylands High School appeared a vastly inferior school plagued by indiscipline and falling, (if not failing), standards. The third parent made a choice solely on the grounds of size. Those choosing to remain with the school saw it as acceptable academically, and, while accepting that there were discipline problems, suggested that these were rather overstated. Remaining parents viewed Limeylands High as on a par with Limeylands Academy, which was considered to be "not as good as it used to be". It seemed therefore that a measure of dissatisfaction is necessary before a request is likely to be made.

The Catholic sample was rather more successful in naming the local schools. This is perhaps to be expected given the location of the catchment area. Most were able to assess more accurately the size of the schools, although once again there was an over-estimation of the rolls. Views of the reputations of the schools were similarly, if not actually more polarised than those amongst Kennox parents, particularly in relation to Brucefield - "acceptable" or "terrible" depending on the choice made. (The negative view was common to parents choosing other Catholic and non-denominational schools.) Blairhall was viewed as a moderate school with little positive or negative comment. Limeylands Academy, however, excited two strands of opinion. On one hand it was viewed as the best school in the area, on the other a tarnished shadow of its former incarnation. Those subscribing to this latter view cited the "split school" with children being bussed from a particularly run down area of the town as an experiment in some sort of

social engineering, and snobbishness as problems inter alia. Those expressing doubts about the Academy were four in number, three who had chosen Blairhall, the other a Brucefield parent. (The parent who expressed no doubts about the Academy rejected it on religious grounds.) It is difficult to establish how much of this was due to post hoc rationalisation of decisions already made, but it was clear that this offered further support for the notion that dissatisfaction must be present before placing requests will be made.

#### Outcomes and Valences

There are problems to be faced in discussing the questions concerning valences. The structure of the questions was such that parents were first invited to contribute those outcomes which were crucially important to them. This created initial difficulties in that so few of the sample had thought about educational issues in such a way before and thus prompts had to be given. While this may have directed the thinking of the parents, it is difficult to assess how far this is the case. In order to minimise the effect, the same outcome was presented as an example to all parents - "highers". Parents were asked to rate this, and any other they thought to be important on a five point scale. In addition to this, parents were invited to rate outcomes generated by other parents, in order to establish whether they had any wider relevance or use.

The outcomes presented were varied in content, the most consistent being discipline, preparation for life and good basic education. For many parents

the issue of discipline in school was rated low since they felt it to be a parental responsibility. Not surprisingly this was more prevalent among the Catholic sub-sample. This sample was also more strongly in favour of moral education, and, inevitably, religious education. (There was a difference in emphasis within the sample depending on whether a Catholic or non-denominational school had been chosen.)

Analysis of the results failed to show any clear differentiation between parents making requests and those choosing to stay with the catchment area school. This was true both of the Catholic and non-denominational samples.

#### Instrumentalities

It proved to be very difficult to obtain useful data in this area, since parents were generally only poorly aware of the details of their local education system. It would appear that parents did not think in such clearly defined ways as the rationale of the question demanded. For example, even the Catholic parents were not aware in any factual or tangible way about the levels and sorts of religious education offered at both Catholic and, more importantly for those making placing requests, at non-denominational schools. It would appear that parents considered less tangible issues, a point which shall be discussed in the next section. Parents simply did not seem to approach the level of sophistication demanded by the model. There may have been a degree of overlap where the outcome was sufficiently major to be a factor in an approach - avoidance situation. Thus parents could perceive school A to be deficient in, say, discipline, and school B as acceptable. The parent may therefore be registering (dis)satisfaction on a single dimension

and seeking a single alternative, not entering into a weighing up of all the merits and demerits of the alternatives.

### Expectancy

Parents' expectations that a placing request would be granted were measured directly for all schools. Of course, had the information disseminated by Strathclyde Region been fully effective all parents should have had no doubts. In the event only three had, including one parent who had applied for a placing request. Only one parent gave a justification for their response stating that the Education Department would ask (Incredulously) "*why has he done that?*" If the parent applied to Riddochhill or Bedlay, two of the schools perceived to be of lower status.

### Some Further Analysis

Awareness of the existence of the Act was predictably high, although the details were unknown to five of the sample, none of whom had applied for a placing request. Such awareness was defined as knowledge of the procedure to be followed and of at least two of the grounds for refusal. Parents' knowledge of the system previously in operation was rather scant in comparison. Only ten of the sample were aware of the substance of the exceptional transfer procedure, even although it had applied to their own children. Of those parents who had made placing requests (ie for Blairhall and Limeylands Academy) only one (of six) was unaware of the provisions of the Act.

All of the sample recalled having received a communication from the Department of Education via the school. Twelve recalled reading of the Act in the Press. Several, however, noted that they would not necessarily recall items of an educational nature from the local press (all except one of the sample regularly received the local evening paper). Two had heard of the "Parents' Charter" on television and a further three at their workplaces.

Only three of the Kennox parents had given any consideration to the possibility of making a placing request. Each ultimately conceded that they were "happy" to a greater or lesser extent with their catchment area school. However, the necessity to pay for transport would, in any event, have been a large disincentive. Neither of the Leadsides parents opting to remain with the catchment area school found any fault with it, and gave no consideration to choice.

#### Justification For Choice

Kennox parents who made choices (3) each felt that Limeylands Academy was a better school than Limeylands High School and had a measure of residual kudos from its days as a fee paying school. Phrases such as "a better calibre of student" and "different children - no bad thing" were used. These seem to make clear the "social" aspect of the choice. Each also felt that the Academy was more "socially acceptable" in terms of its name and the "start" it transmitted to its pupils.

The Catholic parents who had chosen to opt away from the denominational sector and send their children to Limeylands Academy did so for broadly

similar reasons, and also as a consequence of perceived "better discipline" at Limeylands Academy. These parents were also keener to dismiss the educational attributes of the two Catholic Schools in the area - most certainly a dissonance reduction. Blairhall was rated "too rough" and "too far away" (It was actually closer in most cases than Brucefield which was not considered to be too far away).

Those Catholic parents who opted for the other Catholic school, Blairhall roundly condemned Brucefield. Each had contact with Blairhall through siblings and said that they were broadly satisfied with their experience. None of the parents claimed to have considered non-denominational schools - one talked of the stigma of Catholic children in a non-catholic school.

The parents who opted out of the Catholic sector were asked whether their decision would have been the same had a satisfactory alternative existed. Only one said that it would. Others spoke of considerable pressure applied by the Church to try to force them to change their minds on the issue, to the extent of suggestions by local Clergy that "God had been sent from the door". It is difficult to judge whether the vociferous dissatisfaction was more a product of their attempts to justify the decisions to themselves within the terms of their faith than a rational assessment of the worth of the two schools, bearing in mind their lack of knowledge of the details.

#### Value of the Pilot Study

Bearing in mind the limited aims of the Pilot Study a great deal of useful information was gained.

1 Clearly, for all 26 parents interviewed the issue of parental choice was salient. Each presented themselves as caring and felt that, even where no request had been made, had it been necessary to do so, it would have been done. The majority took an active role in approaching the school to discuss problems and attended parents' nights on a regular basis. Each had at least a limited substantive knowledge of the Act.

2 The sampling frame was subject to an unexpected test by the Headteachers. Although not unequivocal there seemed to be enough doubt surrounding the opt in procedure that it would be unwise to adopt it for subsequent studies. Account must of course be taken of the argument that those who would "consent" to take part in an "opt in" situation would be those for whom the decision would be especially salient. Certainly this is so, but it is unlikely that all those in this category would make the effort required to opt in. For this reason, it was perceived to be better to concede that some apparent acceptances would prove to be from people for whom the decision was not salient, such people being retrospectively discarded from the sample.

3 The questionnaire was successful in achieving its aims in almost all areas. The apparent failure of the instrumentality question may in fact be doubly significant in that clear arguments may be advanced suggesting that it is the concept itself which may be irrelevant. (See Chapter 8 below.) The problems of shared meaning (touched on in Chapter 2) were amply demonstrated, but it was perhaps even more significant that parents were uncomfortable, and largely unable, to generate outcomes of their own.



4 While the issue of choice was salient to all of the sample, the levels of information held were surprisingly low. Parents had little idea of the merits, facilities or policies of individual schools including those to which their child was either to be assigned or sent. Opinions were certainly held but these centred on the social aspects of the education system.

5 Although no formal test of the model was undertaken in the Pilot Study, the existence of several of the proposed thresholds was established. Saliency seemed to be a prerequisite. One parent felt that the decision of choice of school was more properly left to the educational professionals (the woman was educated to University standard and thus it can be assumed that she held this view from a position of strength). It seemed, therefore, that a threshold of "responsibility" may be pertinent. Similarly, the whole issue of dissatisfaction will be a keystone of the following and subsequent chapters.

6 Given the retrospective circumstances of the research it was not possible to investigate more than the components of an Expectancy formulation. There was clear evidence that parents seemed to operate, (either consciously or otherwise) a bounded rationality approach to information gathering - a long way from the perfect knowledge demanded by expectancy theory. It would appear that only those who considered themselves to be dissatisfied with the catchment area school considered a change. Given parents' lack of knowledge, there must be some doubt as to whether a model assessing outcomes would be an accurate reflection of the decisions made



by parents in the Inverclyde division. Whether this was a local or more general problem remained to be seen.

### Summary

In conclusion, it must be said that the Pilot Study was a success in realising its aims. The methodology and approach were tested and, more importantly, several issues were raised, most notably : whether parents were rational; dissatisfaction; information gathering; bounded rationality and, by extension, the whole issue of satisficing. These issues were central to the subsequent first main study, a report of which will constitute the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### Evidence From The Second Study

#### Aims

While the Pilot Study was broadly concerned with preparing the ground for research into parental choice, in establishing the general salience of the issue and the practicality of investigation, the Second Study was concerned with furthering the search for a model of parental choice. The Second Study does not address all the questions posed by the provisional model. Rather, it exploits the benefits of its methodology, to focus on areas which can be seen to be more qualitative.

The Second Study focussed on several aspects of the provisional model. Once again, the broad salience of the topic was addressed, as it should be in every research situation, by means of addressing thresholds. The thresholds were also addressed in a qualitative way in order to ascertain, for example, the range of stability variables (see Chapter 3) which could lead to non-choice, or why, despite their existence, a choice was still to be made. The second major area addressed was information, primarily those sources which parents found to be important, their pathways to information about the school system and the range of people with whom they would discuss choice of school. The third area investigated was parents' views of both their local and other schools, both as a major topic of interest in itself, and as a way

to establish what kind of information parents used to form opinions about the schools. Following from this, aspects of the school which parents thought to be important were investigated. This was not done in a scaled fashion, and thus no numerical analysis following an EV model was possible. However, this was never the purpose, as this study was done to elucidate the range of possible outcomes, establish patterns and firm up the choice of those to be used in the third study. The last major area to be covered was parents' justifications for their choice, essentially the question, "why did you do that?"

#### Overview of the Chapter

Having established the aims of the Second Study, the exact methodology to be employed will be discussed. The study area was introduced in Chapter 4. The following section will discuss the method of approach and the questionnaire itself. The subsequent section will present a largely uncritical summary of the results, both quantitative and qualitative, to be followed by an analysis of the findings. The final section will present a brief discussion of the topics identified in the aims, pointing forward to the Third Study, a report of which will form Chapter 7, and to Chapter 8 which will attempt to draw together all the disparate aspects of the research into a coherent model.

#### Method and Questionnaire

The Second and Third studies employed different research techniques. (See Chapter 4.) While the latter utilised a postal questionnaire of an essentially, although not wholly, quantitative nature, the present study

addressed its aims by means of an extensive, semi-structured interview technique. As noted in the foregoing section, it was felt that this means would be ideal to explore the issues chosen to be covered. Clearly there were drawbacks with such an approach, most notably, the constraint of time. It was thus unlikely that a large number of interviews could be done between the point at which choice was offered and that at which it was nominally made.

To balance this, the semi-structured technique, as discussed in the previous chapter, was ideal for wide ranging discussion at the margins of the topic - often leading to valuable lines of enquiry. It was felt that to do the postal questionnaire first would be wasteful, in that new lines of enquiry established at interview could not be followed up. It was thus felt to be justified to use this ordering of methods.

### Method

It had become clear from the Pilot Study that certain techniques should be favoured. First among these was the employment of an opt-out technique. To recap, the schools in the Pilot Study, at which an opt-out approach was used had a markedly (although not technically proven) higher response rate than those employing an opt-in approach. For this research it was decided that the opt-out method should be used. Permission to use this technique was sought from, and granted by, the Education Department and individual schools (although, to look ahead, this did not prevent one of the Headteachers from summarily altering the method after delivery of the letter to parents). Each parent of a primary 7 child at each of the three schools was sent a letter

asking them to participate in the research and informing them that, should they not wish to participate, they should sign and return the letter to the school. Letters were distributed via the class teachers and primary 7 children. Parents who did not return the letter to the school were further approached either by telephone or in person asking to arrange a time at which the researcher could call, or alternatively, the parent could attend the school.

The justification for attempting to approach a 100% sample lay in the high "refusal" rate obtained in the broadly similar Blackrigg area of Greenock and the resultant desire to try to maximise the response rate at source. A further sampling technique could, of course, have been adopted, should the response rate have necessitated it. No specification was made for mothers/fathers or both to be present for two reasons. Firstly, a large proportion of the target sample was single parents, with their identity as such not always initially apparent. Secondly, any interviews conducted with a non-central figure in the decision process could be later screened out - to try to convey this in advance would almost certainly have led to a decreased response rate.

#### Inter-personal Context

Clearly, there were potential problems for the conduct of the interview in that the parents to be interviewed were drawn almost exclusively from the types of backgrounds where no previous encounters with research, nor indeed with a university in any form, was likely. Similarly, a balance was required between excessive formality of manner and dress and over familiarity on the

other. In order to try to gauge an appropriate level for both manner and dress, contact was made with two social workers whose advice was subsequently heeded. Dress consisted of smart casual trousers with sports jacket as appropriate, and collar and tie. It was not felt desirable for the researcher to adopt a "persona" In, for example, the pretence of local knowledge or accent since this would, if seen through, have undoubtedly lead to the cessation of cooperation on the grounds of patronisation as well as deceit. The advice heeded was effectively to "be yourself, be friendly and don't talk down".

### The Questionnaire

The questions themselves were derived partly from the successful elements of the Pilot Study, and partly from the specific aims of the research itself.

The questionnaire was designed to be completed by the interviewer. Space was left at each question for the responses, and questions were printed only on one side of the page to leave space for notes as required. The questionnaire, to be described in detail below, consisted of four contiguous sections, elements of which had direct bearing on other sections and thus must not be seen to be discrete. The questionnaire was undoubtedly long, requiring an expected 45 minutes to 1 hour for completion.

### Section 1

The first section of the questionnaire was designed to collect biographical data on the interviewees. Some fifteen questions addressed the following topics : number of children and their educational stage reached; age at which

parents had finished secondary school; the nature of this school and whether they had had any form of further education or gained formal qualifications; the number of years they had spent in their present house, and locally, and whether they considered it likely that they would move in the next year; their employment status; the identity of the decision maker; factors preventing participation in the process and a measure of frequency of discussion of a variety of educational issues.

While several of these questions were purely biographical, others related to various of the thresholds described in the provisional model outlined in Chapter 3. The questions relating to the identity of the decision maker were designed to provide a check that, in fact, the parent/s interviewed were involved in the process itself. The final question of this section related broadly to salience in that it offered a general indication of parental interest in their child's education. Two of the questions, relating to the likelihood of moving and factors preventing participation in the decision process, related to the stability threshold - assessing whether anything was likely to impede the decision process. The purely biographical data was collected both as background and as a means to try to discover any differences between choosers and non-choosers. Where appropriate, differentiation was made between husband and wife.

## Section 2

The next section of the questionnaire dealt with broadly the information aspects of the model. Parents were first invited to nominate sources they would or had consulted for information about schools. This was done for two



reasons. Firstly, as a further check on the salience threshold. Clearly any parent who could not produce a reasonable answer to such a question would be unlikely to take much interest in the "nuts and bolts" of their children's education. The second reason was to allow parents to generate sources which may have been important to them but had not been included in the questionnaire. It was thus a check on the content of the list. Where appropriate, parents' own sources were added to the list to be rated. This list formed the bulk of this section of the questionnaire and was drawn from that generated by the Pilot Study (with the exclusion of "priest" since none of the schools involved was Catholic). They were also asked to make any other comments regarding information and communication. Parents were invited to rate each of the sources on a 1-5 scale printed on a card which was handed to them. The scale ranged from "very important" to "not important at all". The rating criterion was the perceived importance of the source to the parents only, not to how important they may have felt they were to other parents. By this means it was hoped to establish which (if any) of the sources parents saw as important and of course to try, if appropriate, to establish any trend among choosers or non-choosers.

Parents were then asked if they had discussed the choice of school for their child with anyone outwith their immediate family. While this was partly a background question, as was the next, relating to whether they felt others were discussing it much, both would help to establish if there appeared to be evidence of a bandwagon effect, that is parents choosing because others were doing so.



The following questions related to the school brochures, to establish their influence primarily among those who opted for schools other than the catchment area school. Parents received only the brochure relating to their catchment area school, those relating to alternative schools had to be specifically requested from the Education Department. It would appear likely that only parents opting for alternative schools would request any brochures.

### Section 3

This section related to school-specific issues. The parents were invited to nominate their own outcomes in preference to using a given list as a means of establishing a range of outcomes which had specific validity to the Pilton/Solsgrith area. Clearly too there were advantages in that while parents responding to given outcomes may say that one or another was very important, it was possible that those which were crucial would be those which would be spontaneously generated. If required, parents were given two prompts : firstly a good music department and secondly 10,000 pupils (to pre-empt later discussion, no parent considered a music department to be centrally important, thus providing a post hoc justification for a perhaps doubtfully safe prompt.) The second stage of the question asked what sorts of things parents felt they would like to see their children gain from attending school. It was hoped that this question would offer some insight into the potential areas on which school choice would depend.

The subsequent questions in Section 3 related to the local schools themselves and their perceived reputations. This question was intended to establish the salient alternatives. Essentially parents were asked what they

thought of their local schools. This question served on several levels. Clearly the information in itself was interesting in building up a picture of a school as it was perceived in the area, but also it provided an indication of the sorts of information parents held about schools. This has great importance in considering how parents would go about making choices. When asked about a school, would they associate academic issues, social issues or extra-curricular issues with the school, to use three examples. On another level, this information provided a measure of satisfaction, which was further investigated in Section 4, as well as an estimate of the perceived quality of any salient or intended school. Parents were asked to rate the school on a 1-5 scale, where 1 was excellent, 5 poor. Parents were subsequently asked to rate the schools as they had perceived them when they themselves were growing up in the area, if appropriate. It was hoped to discover whether this had any bearing on their current view of the school and choices.

#### Section 4

The last section of the questionnaire related more specifically to the dissatisfaction hypothesis and choice justifications. With this aim, parents were asked not only to assess their satisfaction with the catchment area school, but also to associate those specific features which contributed to this dissatisfaction. It was felt that this information would provide a good indicator of reasons why a school had been rejected or chosen which would not necessarily be nominated among any specific justification for choice. The actual rating was designed to give a measure of dissatisfaction in order to try to establish the existence or otherwise of the hypothesis. The subsequent questions related to the bandwagon effect described above,

parents being asked whether they were aware of schools gaining or losing pupils, approximately how many and why, and more specifically, if they were aware of anyone sending their children elsewhere. This series of questions set out to establish more clearly any bandwagon effect among groups of friends or relations, for example, or whether any significant reference group was involved. The range of schools considered was addressed directly and parents were asked to describe how they would go about formally making a request. Clearly the latter was an indicator of the knowledge element of the salience threshold.

Responsibility was established with parents being asked the identity of the party with whom the decision should rest if they felt they were inappropriate to do so. This issue was further pursued by asking whether it was important that their child should attend a school of their choice. This was done to establish just how strongly parents felt about this issue, essentially their right to make a choice of school. It was quite likely that parents making such a choice would feel more strongly about this than would their default option counterparts. The criterion variable was then established, parents being asked if they felt it likely that they would make a placing request and, if so, which school they would choose. In the absence of a placing request the catchment area school would of course be "chosen" as the default option.

## Results

As indicated in the overview of this chapter, this section will focus purely on the raw findings of the questionnaire. While some comments will be made, the bulk of the analysis will be done in the next section.

### a. Method

It had become clear that an opt-out method should prevail in research of this type. With this in mind the design was adopted to utilise this approach. However, in spite of an apparent agreement reached, one of the Headteachers changed the letter completely, assuming that something with her signature would achieve a better response rate. As will be seen, this was not so.

Table 6.1 : Sample Breakdown

	Cardowan	Cartshore	Bardykes	Totals
approached	50	46	69	165
willing on first approach	31	29	13	73
willing on follow up approach	16	16	15	47
Interviewed	16	15	14	45

Not surprisingly, given the results of the Pilot Study, parents proved to be unwilling to "bother" to return something, whether it was a refusal or an acceptance. It is difficult to see any other possible explanation for this discrepancy since, as outlined in Chapter 4, the areas were essentially similar. Parents in the Cardowan area were interviewed first solely as a means of allowing any late returns from Bardykes to appear. This did not happen, and in fact it proved necessary to approach 10 parents, who had

Initially "refused", a second time. Thus the Bardykes figure was made to approach the others.

A final total of 45 parents interviewed was satisfactory, a level of 50 having been previously regarded as acceptable. It proved to be difficult in practice to contact "willing" parents, a fair number of whom contained both working fathers and mothers or mothers with small children who were frequently out. Similarly, compared to Greenock, few of the parents had telephones and thus many of the interviews were carried out either "on the spot" or on a "come back in half an hour" basis. This procedure was, needless to say, wasteful of time and effort. It was decided to halt the interviewing on 22nd December 1983, when it became clear that two interviews which had been arranged in advance had been "forgotten" in favour of Christmas shopping. It was felt that little marginal benefit would be obtained from the pursuit of five more interviews. The sampling frame noted above was not in fact needed, since in the case of Cardowan and Gartshore primaries, only 16 and 15 parents respectively were willing to be interviewed when contacted with a view to arranging an appointment. In the case of Bardykes, 16 parents had expressed a willingness, although only 14 kept the appointment. 44 of the interviews were conducted in the parental home, the sole exception being a woman who wanted to "escape" the decorators and be interviewed in Cardowan school. Length of interview was, not surprisingly considering the open-ended method used, varied, ranging from 20 minutes to 3 hours and 5 minutes. Within these extremes, the modal interview duration was 40-45 minutes.

### Inter-personal aspects

While in the pilot study much of the secondary arrangements had been carried out either by the school or by telephone, many of the present interviews were arranged by door-step visit. In retrospect, this was perhaps a mistake, since the researcher was personally somewhat uncomfortable with this method. Having made contact, if the interview could not be held there and then, the difficulty remained for the second contact. While no data was kept, subjectively, those interviews where the "settling in" period was rather longer than others were those where the initial contact was affected by awkwardness (see below). Curiously, approaches to the schools themselves were not at all a problem leading to the supposition that the researcher was more comfortable (and perhaps more effective) in contacting, although not necessarily dealing with professionals than lay parents. Had an interview-based Third Study been considered, these lessons would have required to have been fully accounted in the methodology.

These issues notwithstanding, the conduct of the interviews was largely successful. The chosen dress and manner seemed to be appropriate for the setting in most cases. There were perhaps some problems caused early in some, but not all, of the interviews through the researcher not immediately becoming comfortable either with the setting or the interviewee. This had been anticipated in the ordering of questions - simple data collection issues were addressed first rather than the key interactive issues. Nevertheless, this continued in one case throughout the interview, although data of a fully acceptable quality was achieved.

## **b.Data**

The data collected was of an acceptable standard. Each of the 45 parents was lucid and seemed to be well aware of the implications of the questions being asked. To pre-empt later discussion, the issue was understandably salient to all of the sample, not perhaps surprising in the light of the issues surrounding the Lothian Regional Council discussion documents outlined in Chapter 4.

The substantive data was not, of course, "complete" in the sense that each parent had formed a definitive answer to each question. However, there seemed to be no instances of parents merely voicing the first answer they had thought of.

### **b1.Biographical Data**

Family size ranged from 1-4 with 2 being modal. In 24 cases there were older children, in 21 no older children. The overwhelming majority of both fathers and mothers left school at 15 and only 18% had any further education.

Quite surprisingly, 91% of the sample were in some type of full or part time employment, only 2 of the males being unemployed. Similarly, 42 of those interviewed had been resident in the area for over 6 years and only one of these thought it likely that they would move. Although a further 7 parents felt that they may move, this is nevertheless indicative of a high level of stability.

It will be recalled that a check was carried out that, in each case, a member of the family actively involved in the decision making process was interviewed. The decision makers were split as follows :

Table 6.2 : Identity of Decision Makers

	n	%age
Father	5	11
Mother	13	29
Father and Mother	25	56
All	2	4

Other possible decision makers which produced a null response were father or mother with the child, and anyone else. In no cases was there any reason why one or other of the parents (where appropriate) was prevented from taking an active part in the decision making process. In one case the father was an oil rig worker working 2 weeks on and 2 weeks off. The parents themselves did not view this as a problem given that most decisions of any importance were generally given more than two weeks notice, and that both parents were in regular telephone contact. In each case, a decision maker was present at interview.

Parents were asked to rate how often they discussed education with four groups of people : between themselves; their children; teachers and others outwith the family. The categorisation was deliberately subjective since it may have been that while one parent would consider once a week to be "often", another would regard once a term similarly. The crucial issue was



how the individual subjectively perceived the scale of contact. The following summary table presents the findings :

Table 6.3 : Frequency of Discussion

	each	child	teachers	others
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
very often	32	43	27	31
sometimes	6	1	14	3
rarely	0	0	4	11
(n)	(38)	(44)	(45)	(45)

Following from this, all parents discussed education with some other person at least "sometimes". Perhaps most surprising was the finding that eleven parents did not discuss their child's education with their friends. However, all of these parents in fact discussed it with teachers. It would be fair to suggest, therefore, that these findings provide some evidence for the salience of school based education in general terms.

#### b2.Information

Responses to the question regarding how the parents would go about obtaining information were varied and wide ranging. All parents mentioned the school itself, whether generally, or the Headteacher specifically somewhere among their alternatives. Other answers given were the "Education Department", "community welfare officer", "newspapers", "books", "children" and "other parents". The range of generated responses accords well with the list used in the second half of this section and this seems to suggest that this latter list is a valid one.

At the time of interviewing, distribution of the brochures had been patchy and 19 of the sample had not received their copy. The responses of those who had were mixed. However, given the distribution problems and resultant small sample size, it would be unwise to draw too many conclusions from this.

Similarly, responses to the question regarding the usefulness of open days and meetings for parents in providing school specific information were again divided, with only 50% finding them "very useful", 20% "no use at all". To this latter figure may be added a further 11% who did not attend any such events. Not surprisingly, parents considered the information that could be gained from other parents to be of differing levels of usefulness, only a little over half (23) finding it in any way a useful source.

Parents demonstrated some doubt as to how useful their own children could be in providing school based information, a clear majority disputing that they could. Older children were considered to be extremely useful by their parents.

A surprisingly large percentage of parents felt that school staff were of little use in providing information. Around 1 in 4 (11) felt primary teachers, 1 in 3 (15) secondary teachers to be no use at all. It is perhaps surprising that as many as 33 of the sample had discussed school choice outwith the family, indeed only 12 said they had not. 38 parents felt that others were discussing choice, only 7 assuming that others were not.

### b2a. Outcomes

These questions produced a fascinating array of school and education based variables. No fewer than 22 outcomes were mentioned in the course of 45 interviews. Even allowing for individualistic interpretations, a frequency table was constructed. 11 of the outcomes were mentioned by more than one parent, another 11 being particular to individual parents.

Table 6.4 Outcomes

rank	outcome	n	%age
1	Discipline	36	80
2	Teachers	25	56
3	Exams	21	47
4	Wide Range of Subjects	18	40
5	Basic Education Important	16	36
6	Life Preparation	14	31
7	School Uniform Policy	10	22
7	Secure Future for School	10	22
9	Child Happy	5	11
10	Proximity to Home	4	9
10	Gives Help with Problems	4	9

n.b. The percentage represents the proportion of the whole sample mentioning the particular outcome. Parents were not, of course, restricted to single outcomes. The other 11 outcomes mentioned by parents were as follows :

Table 6.4a Other Outcomes Mentioned

Moral Education  
Art  
Comradeship  
Headteachers  
School Buildings  
Computers  
Streaming  
Work Experience  
Outdoor Activities  
Homework  
Respect

### b3.School Reputations

Not surprisingly parents' views of whether a school was or was not perceived to be "local" were consistent with the geographical distance of the school from the parents' home.

A reputation may be best seen as an aggregation of perceived individual opinions. How a reputation comes to be formed is problematic. In a longitudinal study it may well be possible to identify "critical incidents" which have shaped and directed a reputation. However, this would not be possible in a study such as this. Alternatively, a reputation may be founded principally on the longevity and traditions of an establishment, which bear little resemblance to the current reality. Such opinions may only be founded in hearsay, not contact. The essential point regarding reputations is that they are subjective. Given this, it is not at all surprising that views of school should be polarised. Each of the schools in the study was described as both "excellent" and "terrible", including, it should be emphasised, the high status recipient schools, Sheriffyards and Fleets. This is not to imply that, averaged over all parents, there was not a perceived difference in the reputations, there was, but more to state that these were not fixed, nor held by all parents within a group.

**Table 6.5 : Summary Table of Reputations Within the Sample Group**

	Excellent	Good	So-so	Not Good	Terrible	Rating
Foulshields	1	9	4	4	7	-.14
Solsgrith	6	12	7	10	8	-.25
Shieldmains	2	4	3	3	2	+.35
Sheriffyards	3	2	3	0	1	+.345
Fleets	12	9	5	4	1	+.435

n.b. The "rating" was obtained by using a weighted mean. The rating ranged from 1 to -1.

A surprising feature to emerge from this table is the "rating" for Solsgrith. Given that the school was losing pupils heavily, it would not be expected to "perform" as well as it seemed to do. The status of Fleets and Sheriffyards is neither surprising nor unexpected, while Shieldmains seemed to fare a little worse than would be intuitively expected, performing not significantly better than Solsgrith.

It is instructive to look beyond the raw statistical data to the sorts of views parents held about each school and thus to the elements of its reputation. It was not surprising that parents who had strong personal contact with a school were more vociferous in their opinions, positive or negative. Two parents condemned schools because of their experience of working in close proximity. One, a shop owner, had suffered vandalism at the hands of pupils, while another, rowdy behaviour in the shop in which she worked. A further two parents had worked inside schools. The first had had tools stolen while the second condemned the indiscipline and arrogance of the pupils and questioned the quality and suitability of the accommodation.

Parents living in close proximity to one of the schools spoke of the "four o'clock rabble" and "damaged hedges". In contrast to this, commenting on such attitudes, one parent asked why "they" thought that any other school would be different. A number of parents commented on allegations of drug taking at one of the schools, one tempering this with the observation that (he) imagined that "all schools were about the same". General indiscipline among both pupils and staff was mentioned by a number of parents and indicted as leading to both bullying and poor examination results.

Positive comment was in some ways more interesting. While negative comments were strongest amongst those having direct experience, positive comment was forthcoming both from this group and more readily from those with no prior contact. Among supporters of all schools, the quality of the education on offer was generally placed first, perceived to be manifest by exam results, the nature of the curriculum and good teachers. Discipline was frequently mentioned, particularly by those who had criticised other schools as being deficient. Both these aspects were combined by a parent who felt that a particular school offered a "better learning experience and environment". Supporters of higher status schools reinforced this status. One parent stated that he wished his daughter to grow up among (this) "better class of people".

While only one parent actually said so explicitly, it was clear that this sentiment pervaded many other arguments in support of these schools, only reluctance to state potentially embarrassing opinions preventing others. The Headteachers at two of the schools, both prominent local personalities, were commended, one for his imaginative approach to education, easy way with

pupils and staff, and for his success in attracting money to the school, the other being credited with "doing a great job" in revitalising what they (the parents) had seen as a flagging school and for opening up previously closed lines of communication.

#### b4. Dissatisfaction

The issue of dissatisfaction was, of course, inextricably linked to parents' perceptions of the particular school concerned. The position of one parent who had recently moved to another part of the city, some 4 miles away, was problematic. However, given their expressed view that, had they not, for family reasons, been forced to move, their child would undoubtedly have attended Solsgirth, their catchment area school and given their satisfaction with this alternative, it seems reasonable to treat them as if they were part of this catchment area. This does not affect the overall aggregate of those choosing to send their child to the "catchment area school", since their child would attend their new catchment area school.

Table 6.6 Satisfaction with Catchment Area School

	Very sat	Quite sat	So-so	Quite dis	Very dis	Rating
Solsgirth	13	11	4	6	11	+0.2*

\* weighted mean

While not strongly so, it should nevertheless be noted that the rating for Solsgirth was positive. 24 of the catchment area parents considered themselves to be at least "quite satisfied", a majority of three over those

who felt themselves to be only so-so or lower. The relationship of dissatisfaction to choice behaviour will be discussed below.

#### b5. Choice Behaviour

44 of the parents considered that the responsibility for choice lay ultimately with them. The 45th considered that, although legally impossible at ages younger than 16, morally the final say lay with their child. (In fact the child, who was present throughout the interview, wanted a school other than that preferred by his parents, and true to their stance, the child's wishes prevailed). One of those interviewed who considered that the choice should ultimately lie with the parents was nevertheless uneasy with such a responsibility. He noted that people choose for "selfish" reasons and suggested that the "possible closure" of Solsgirth had only come about thanks to parental choice and that this choice was made for social and not educational reasons. He felt angry that "these people" had not exercised "responsibility" towards those who wanted to stay with the assigned school. He did feel, however, that a "responsible" choice (in his terms) was acceptable.

An interesting side issue in terms of choice behaviour lies with the observation that in many cases the identity of the school was a matter for some dispute among the family. For example, in one case the father of a boy felt that his son should attend Sheriffyards, while his mother felt that a private school should be the first choice. The boy was against such a choice and in the end a compromise was reached in choosing a school elsewhere in the city (not among those in the study area). The group dynamics of such a



decision cannot be readily mirrored in a study requiring only a single approach be made to each parent group.

Further to this, there were a number of cases where the wishes of the child were over-ridden by those of the parents. The justifications for this were split between those who did so for discipline reasons and those for academic reasons. A typical example being a parent who chose Fleets for both of his children for "old-fashioned" discipline. He did not read the Solsgirth brochure because, he claimed, he did not need to. Despite both children wishing to attend Solsgirth along with their friends they were over-ruled. Taking this one stage further, the parent suggested that he would have no qualms about moving them in the middle of their secondary education if they were not making "sufficient progress".

The decision as to whether a parent had sufficient knowledge to exercise a choice was of course subjective. The ad hoc criteria adopted were a minimum of a) a sensible suggestion as to who they could ask for information and b) knowing the identity of at least one of the statutory exclusions. In almost all cases the exclusion given was "school is full". Among those who did not know exactly what to do about making a request, the answers given were either the "Education Department" or the "school". It seems fair to assume that all 45 parents were in possession of sufficient information to allow them, if desired, to exercise their right to make a choice of school. Among those who proposed to exercise their right, only two felt that acceptance of their request was less than 100% certain, feeling that it was only "quite likely". This did not appear to be a barrier to their proceeding with a request. (A point of interest is that both of these requests related to

Sheriffyards, at that time one of only two schools in Lothian Region at which there was, arguably, even the remotest possibility of a refusal.)

An interesting side issue is that a number of parents perceived that a placing request could be refused on the grounds of academic ability. This feeling was not restricted to those not making placing requests. One parent, making a request for Shieldmains, surmised that her daughter's marks must have been sufficiently good to have her accepted. Among parents not making requests there was a similar perception that Sheriffyards School (former fee-paying and still high status) would exercise a veto on the grounds of social acceptability.

Of the 45 parents interviewed, 30 had considered choosing an alternative school for their child. 15 had not considered any choices other than to remain with the catchment area school. Four of the parents had considered more than one alternative school (why this was in each case will be discussed below). The summary table of school destinations was as follows :

Table 6.7 School Destinations

	n	%age
Solsgirth	16	36
Foulshields	7	16
Shieldmains	4	9
Fleets	14	31
Sheriffyards	2	4
Others	2	4

Excluding the parents who, having moved to another area and thus opting for their new catchment area school, around 40% of those eligible to attend Solsgirth would in fact do so. By the figures for placing requests in the previous year, this was perhaps slightly low. However, this disparity was not felt to be a significant problem.

In terms of numbers of placing requests made to numbers opting for the default option the following distribution was obtained :

Table 6.8 Placing Requests

	n	%age
yes	25	56
no	20	44
	-----	
	45	

Thus, in fact, numbers of choosers and stayers were both sufficiently large to facilitate comparisons between the groups on a variety of variables. This was done in the analysis below.

For the record, 3 parents considered that their decisions would have been different had the future of Solsgirth been more secure. In each case, the parents had little to take issue with in terms either of the education experience or disciplinary record of Solsgirth. Two spoke of there being "no point" in starting their children at the school just for them to be transferred to Fleets in two years, and thus they felt they were pre-empting the inevitable by making the decision at that time. On the other hand, two

parents not choosing to make requests at that time noted that they might have considered a move to Fleets more seriously had they not felt the inevitability that their children would move to the school in due course anyway. It is interesting to construct a further table in which those parents whose decisions were solely motivated by the closure threat were reclassified as stayers. In this way a somewhat different distribution is obtained :

Table 6.9 Notional "Non-Closure" Distribution

	n	%age
yes	22	49
no	23	51

Justification of the original classification of primary schools was only partly realised. While Cardowan (loyal) and Bardykes (split) were supported, the figure for Gartshore suggested a "disloyal" school. No fewer than 80% of Gartshore parents interviewed intended to make placing requests, thus :

Table 6.10 Requests by Primary School

	yes	no
Cardowan	5	11
Gartshore	12	3
Bardykes	8	6
	25	20

#### b5a. Justifications

While, inevitably, there were many justifications offered by parents couched in terms of their own particular circumstances, it was possible to infer certain significant patterns.

Although impossible to quantify, it must be assumed that the latent threat to Solsgirth prompted some parents who might otherwise not have given consideration to choice to do so. Awareness of the general facts of the issue was very high among all parents, most taking it as a foregone conclusion that, at some stage, Solsgirth would close.

As noted in the previous section, three parents made their decision solely on the basis of the uncertain future of Solsgirth. They were not otherwise dissatisfied with the school. (In one sense, of course, they were dissatisfied with the future stability of the school.)

While for the most part parents indicated that the decisions had been of their own making, it was noted that in two cases they had followed the clear advice of their child's primary teacher. This raises a side issue in whether, in fact, such advice is desirable or indeed ethical. It is difficult to see why primary teachers are any better placed than any other outsider to judge the overall merit or suitability of the education for the child concerned. There was no indication that special educational circumstances prevailed in either case. Teachers were clearly regarded as significant others in terms of making the decision.

Many parents were clearly dissatisfied, but by no means all. Justification for decisions included both positive and negative reasons, for example attraction of good teachers and avoidance of trouble.

In nine cases, parents were repeating choices that had been made for elder children, only two being placing requests. Thus seven parents who had had elder children at Solsgirth chose to send a second, or subsequent child to the school, citing the success of that child as a prime reason. It is important not to view these choices as merely the desire to keep siblings together, since in each case they also expressed a positive statement about their child's experience at the relevant school.

No fewer than nine parents expressed their justification in terms of identifiably social factors. (This was in some contrast to their earlier reluctance to ascribe a school's reputation to such factors.) One parent noted that the "social environment (was) crucial", another that the "social mix (was) better". Four parents went as far as to suggest that a "better class" of child attended their chosen school, one further suggesting that "only clever kids go there". Several of these same parents noted that "the area" of the intended school was "better" (in one case Sheriffyards, in the others Fleets). Two parents used the pejorative term "clientele" to describe the children at Solsgirth.

Given that discipline was mentioned by the highest number of parents as being important it is not surprising that this was cited most often as a justification. Eleven parents claimed that shortcomings in discipline had been mainly responsible for their choice. In 10 cases these were parents opting

away from the catchment area school. One parent felt that discipline at Solsgirth was a strong motivating factor in his decision to send his child there. Those who thought otherwise spoke of a "rabble", "bullying", "disgrace" and at its extreme "that school is not good enough for my daughter to set foot in".

In no fewer than fourteen cases, parents described themselves as broadly happy with the catchment area school without offering further justifications. As noted above, seven of these had had elder children attending Solsgirth. In three cases (including the specific one mentioned in conjunction with the locus of responsibility) the final decision was reflective of the child's preference, in two cases the parents not having had specific recommendations to make.

Five parents expressed other justifications for their choices. One had chosen Solsgirth because it was closest. Trouble caused by an elder sibling had forced one parent to send their younger child to another school in order to avoid the possible stigma. A further parent could offer no particular reason at all for their choice. She saw no reason why her child should not go to Solsgirth, or indeed any other school, and thus merely accepted this default.

An interesting case study is provided by a parent, a policeman who proffered the view that "all schools are equally bad" and further stated that, having chosen not to send his daughter to a fee paying school, his only real choice in education terms was to emigrate to Switzerland, whose system he professed to admire. Most interesting was his observation that he was prepared to accept that his daughter would be "held back" by the decision for her to

attend Solsgirth but that it did not concern him. This was the only case of a parent admitting to putting their own priorities first, although, as will be discussed below, many more could be inferred.

The final parent discussed here is perhaps the most interesting of all. While noting that he had "heard good things" about Solsgirth, he nevertheless had treated the invitation to express a choice as just that, and spoke of considering both Solsgirth and other schools, asking views and seeking information before settling on Fleets after what he considered to be careful consideration of the data he had obtained.

A summary table can thus be presented :

Table 6.11 Main Justifications for Choice

	n	%age
Satisfied with catchment area	14	31
Discipline	11	25
Social Factors	9	20
"Closure"	3	7
Child's decision	3	7
Other justifications	5	11
	45	



## Analysis

### General Points

As noted above, this section will offer a preliminary analysis of the results - In effect a presentation of the evidence from the Second Study which will point forward to the full discussion in Chapter 8.

### Sallence of the Issue

Assessing sallence was easily achieved. All parents regularly discussed education with one or other of the alternatives suggested to them in the appropriate question and each was aware of the identity of the catchment area school to which their child had been assigned. In terms of awareness of choice, all 45 parents were able to give a suitable answer when asked how they would go about making a choice. Those who were not specifically aware of the procedure generally suggested that they would contact either their primary school, their intended secondary school or indeed the Lothian Region Department of Education ("Torphichen Street") direct. Each of these answers is certainly valid since each would lead to the receipt of correct forms, directions, etc. In terms of possible exclusions, the most popular answer was that the school was full.

While the foregoing has been assessed in terms of objective criteria, it is also worthwhile to state that, subjectively, there was no doubt that the issue of parental choice was salient to these parents. That it should be so was due partly to the issue of school closure as it related to Solsgirth. All

of the parents were aware of this issue to a greater or lesser extent, most discussed it, and a majority of those favourably disposed to Solsgirth (for whom the salience of choice is not directly established) claimed to have attended a parents' meeting called by the Education Department to discuss the Discussion Document (see Chapter 4). Whether salience would be as high in an area where closure was not an issue is problematic and suggests caution in generalising from these findings at this stage. (See Chapter 9 below).

### Who Chooses?

It will be recalled from the analysis of the Pilot Study (Chapter 5) that responsibility was generally felt to lie with the parents alone. The Solsgirth sample of parents interviewed for the Second Study, in the main, agreed with this. As noted above, only one parent felt that the final choice should rest elsewhere, in her case with the child. This was, of course, legally impossible, as the child had not attained 16, the age at which he became entitled to make a choice. The decision legally had to remain the parent's, although how this "parental" decision was reached was irrelevant in the eyes of the law. (The issue is similar to that which obtains in cases of truancy. Although a child may decide, against parental wishes, not to attend school, it is nevertheless the parent who carries the responsibility for the child's education, and is thus liable to prosecution for failing to fulfill their obligation to educate the child.)

In terms of the locus of the decision rather than the responsibility, the table reproduced in the previous section clearly hides as much as it reveals.

As the example noted at the time makes clear, there are substantial group dynamics which may come into play within the family. This has some implications for the imposition of a static model of parental choice like EV. If the actual process is more fluid, it is unlikely that such a model can do justice to the complexity of the decision itself. There were many instances of disagreement between parents on aspects of the school experience, for example in one case on the desirability of children becoming "familiar" with their teachers, the father arguing that this was more reflective of the real world and thus likely to accelerate the child's preparation for the world of work. On the other hand, the mother argued that this would be detrimental both to the respect in which she felt teachers should be held and to the overall climate of discipline. Such micro disagreements were certainly carried through to the macro level. In the case mentioned in the previous section of a child being sent to a school outwith the area, the father suggested that it would be the mother's will which would win out, the father and son would acquiesce.

There seemed to be only a single instance of a parent accepting a passive default. Clearly this cannot be proven in the case of other parents since it could be that the presence of the researcher caused them to "invent" or pad out reasons which were not in fact pertinent. While no tangible proof can be offered, it seems likely that the high level of salience enjoyed by the subject indicated that parents were indeed, as they claimed, discussing the issue regularly among themselves and with others, and in the process, making up their minds on the issues and thus a choice of school.

It is a moot point whether the parent mentioned in the previous section who condemned all schools as equally bad was, in fact, abrogating his responsibility and making a passive choice of the catchment area school. The parent's own view was that parental choice was an "irrelevance" because there were no differences between schools.

This issue was developed by another parent who felt that there should be no need for parental choice. The system should ensure that all schools were equally effective. This was not simply a call for the extension of comprehensive education, since the parent had claimed elsewhere in the interview that the comprehensive system had failed.

Few parents seemed particularly strong in their commitment to their rights, few suggesting that such a right was crucial or even very important. Most parents were at best ambivalent when asked to assess the strength of feeling regarding how crucial it was to them to be able to make such a choice. This would hardly suggest that the rights themselves were held to be important in principle and that, if removed, would lead to outcry.

This seems broadly in line with the view expressed in Chapter 1 that, prior to the Education Act, the right to choose a school was little thought of and not actively sought, except by a small minority of parents who were unable to achieve their ends under the previously prevailing exceptional admissions procedures. Significantly, a number of parents felt that choice, while a good thing in principle, was nevertheless being misused. Further comment on this issue will be offered below.

### Barriers to Choice

Comment was made above regarding the high stability of the area in terms of years of residence and likelihood of moving. Coupled to the fact that no parents felt that either partner was prevented from participating in the choice, this seems to suggest that there was little to act as a barrier to choice. Certainly in terms of the threshold as outlined in Chapter 3 this is so. However, there are two further issues which could act as such. The first of these will be recalled from the Pilot Study.

Parents in the Kennox Primary School catchment area considered that the refusal of Strathclyde Regional Council to provide free bus passes had the force of an exclusion. This issue was raised by several parents in the present study whose circumstances were clearly far from comfortable and certainly within the range in which a pass would have otherwise have been granted. Two women made the point that not only was the issue of a bus pass involved, but also the provision of free school meals, given that any chosen school would be, by definition, further away than would the catchment area school. One parent, who claimed that she may have otherwise considered choice, stated that she felt that such parents were being "punished" for "daring to opt" for another school. This exclusion was real in that it was felt by less well-off parents who had no means of recovering the outlay. This was undoubtedly outside the spirit, although not the letter, of the legislation. This is an issue which will be further discussed in Chapter 9.

The second issue is more complex. Some parents felt that their choice was being denied them because of political intervention in the name of parental choice. As well as the three parents opting away from Solsgirth purely because of the closure threat, further parents blamed the, as they saw it, indiscriminate granting of choice to people ill-equipped to use it responsibly for the potential closure situation. On many occasions, parents opting to remain with Solsgirth claimed that those opting away were doing so for the wrong reasons, basically for primarily social reasons and "snobbishness". As a consequence, Solsgirth was being seen to become non-viable and thus vulnerable to politicians seeking to make cuts in the face of a declining local population. This is a highly emotive issue, since clearly those opting away will also feel that they are making a responsible, although somewhat different, decision. However, as will be shown below in the section detailing information gathering and school contacts, there is good evidence for questioning these assumptions.

Among both choosers and stayers, the legislation itself did not seem to place barriers to the exercise of parental choice. At the time of the research there was no reason why any request should not have been granted at secondary level. None of the Region's schools had been deemed full, nor would any request have resulted in additional buildings or teachers. Bearing these points in mind, it is not surprising that all parents felt that requests would at least "probably" be granted. Those two parents who felt that there was a less than 100% chance of success both opted for Sherliffyards. As has been seen, there was no factual substance to this view, and a likely explanation is that they wished to reinforce the notion of the quality and status of the school of their choice. Whether this was for the benefit of

the interviewer or themselves is debatable. One of the parents talked in terms of having to "struggle hard but it'll be worth it". Perhaps more realistically, one parent had had problems having a child accepted at another school under the exceptional admissions policy, leading the parent to comment that he wished that the 1981 Act had been in force at that time, since there was now no question that requests would be granted. It is safe to say that low expectation of success did not prevent any parent making an application for a placing request. Given the prevailing situation regarding requests in the Region, this was as it should have been.

It is perhaps most interesting that working class parents should still, in the face of ten years experience of comprehensive education, feel that schools could have the right of veto against insufficiently academic pupils. Certainly such a proposal was put forward at various times by the Conservative Party in opposition but it was never implemented. While perhaps this reflects a clear lack of knowledge about the education system and particularly its detail, it may also indicate that in such areas, education is still held a little in awe, a view perhaps supported by the notion that one school in particular could still exercise a veto on social grounds. The whole issue seems also to indicate that proponents of the comprehensive system have not been effective in getting over their message. The allied issue of residual reputations will be discussed below.

#### Note

In the following pages, "choosers" and "stayers" will be discussed a great deal and thus it would seem useful at this point to define the terms.

Choosers are simply those who stated that they intended to make a placing request, stayers those who stated that they would elect to remain with the catchment area school.

### Perceived Dissatisfaction

Given the homogeneity of the three study schools, it is not surprising that the collected data on education levels, time in the area and local knowledge should have failed to show any differences between schools. Similarly, the outcomes detailed in Section b2a earlier in this chapter are common more or less equally to each of the groups. There are, however, some differences in the patterns of choice between schools.

Table 6.12 : Is the Intended School the Catchment Area School ?

	yes	no
Cardowan	11	5
Gartshore	3	12
Bardykes	6	8
	20	25

Clearly Cardowan was, as expected, a "loyal" school, with almost 70% of pupils transferring to the catchment area school, Solsgirth. Similarly, Bardykes was shown to be split. This was, of course, in keeping with patterns of past choice. More surprising was the choice pattern for Gartshore. Previously, a large majority of children from this school had attended Solsgirth. However, in this case, only three of the sample intended to do so. As noted above, there were no significant differences between valued



outcomes, but while Cardowan parents rated Solsgirth highly, eleven parents considering themselves to be "satisfied", only four Cartshore parents did so. This seems to offer some support for a dissatisfaction hypothesis, but this will be discussed more fully later in the chapter.

In the discussion at the end of Chapter 5, it was suggested that the most important evidence to emerge from the Pilot Study related to the likely existence of the dissatisfaction hypothesis. It should be stated from the outset that this is fully supported by this study. In the previous section an index of overall satisfaction was created for Solsgirth and it will be recalled that it was, albeit weakly, positive.

A rigid application of the dissatisfaction hypothesis would, of course, involve all choosers being dissatisfied and all stayers being satisfied. This is clearly unlikely to happen in reality and the essence of the hypothesis is that a sufficient level of discontent needs to be present before choice is likely to occur. There is a highly significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 25.345$   $p < .001$ ) between choosers and stayers in terms of their satisfaction with the catchment area school. Put simply, a clear majority of those remaining at Solsgirth was broadly satisfied, an equally clear majority of those choosing other schools was broadly dissatisfied. On the surface this seems to be a clear case of re-inventing the wheel - of course those who are dissatisfied leave. In fact it is not quite so simple. Consider the following:

**Table 6.13 : Those who Considered a Choice**

	yes	no
-----	-----	-----
Choosers	25	0
Stayers	5	15

From the table, it will be noted that five parents did in fact consider other schools before settling for the catchment area school. In fact, four of these parents had only done so in the light of the possible closure of Solsgirth and having subsequently satisfied themselves of its future, ceased their consideration. They were, in a sense, initially dissatisfied with the stability and future of Solsgirth. The fifth parent, while initially dissatisfied, was sufficiently swayed by the contents of the school brochure to actively choose the catchment area option. This seems to indicate that, for these parents, a sufficient level of dissatisfaction with an important outcome had to be present before another school was chosen.

Among those who made requests, five of the parents did not record dissatisfaction with Solsgirth, and their cases bear more detailed examination. Three of the parents claimed to have made their decisions solely in the light of the uncertain future of Solsgirth. A fourth did not send (his) daughter to Solsgirth because of trouble previously caused by an elder sibling. Only one of the parents (discussed above and below) considered the choice to be between a number of local schools. Thus, on closer examination, all 20 stayers considered themselves generally satisfied and among those making requests, convincing justifications can be offered for those not apparently dissatisfied. (One parent of course was relatively satisfied in that he considered all schools to be equally bad). This seems clear evidence

for the existence of the dissatisfaction hypothesis and to call into question the free choice hypothesis as outlined in Chapter 3. The implications of this will be discussed below.

### Information and School Reputations

Analysis of this section will focus on two aspects of the questionnaire, firstly the various sources of information, and secondly the school reputations.

It is quite clear that parents did not regard all sources as equally important. It will be remembered that parents were asked whom they would approach for information regarding the school system. In the main, parents' answers were elements of the school system itself, Headteachers, school staff, schools in general and even the Education Department. The finding is, to an extent, validated by the fact that 30 parents felt primary school staff and 26 felt secondary school staff to be useful sources of information. The validation is, however, far from complete since 11 and 14 parents respectively said staff were of "no use". This is curious given that all 45 parents nominated "school" as their first expressed choice of information source. It would appear that for some parents, the schools suffered from a credibility gap - they were not believed. Many parents complained that both primary and secondary schools were "unapproachable" and "uncommunicative". While the schools themselves would doubtless disagree with this subjective perception, nevertheless it appears strong among the sample. In terms of the proposed model, it is the status of the "school" as a source of information which differs between these two groups of parents. For one group, school may

be perceived as a "legitimising" source, while for the second it is merely an "information" source.

As will be recalled from the previous section, two parents felt that the opinions of their child's teachers were of sufficient value to be acted upon. There is of course a chance that in this case parents were merely trying to show the worth of their decisions by offering apparently professional corroborative evidence.

The status of parents' nights and open days is also interesting. In raw terms, these sources were regarded overall as the most useful of all by parents, with no fewer than 21 rating it "very important". While this is, in itself, interesting, there is also a marked difference between choosers and stayers on these sources. A t-test is in fact significant ( $t = 2.40$   $p > .02$ ). What makes this particularly interesting is that, of all the sources, parents' nights were the only ones involving direct contact with the schools themselves. It would have been logical to assume that parents opting for an alternative school would find open days particularly useful. This was not so. Similarly, only two parents had read brochures relating to other schools and one of these was a stayer who had "read it at a friend's house". This seems to be very much at odds with parents' expressed opinions as to the importance of such brochures - regarded as useful, yet remaining unread.

This clearly suggests that the parents in this sample made decisions without reference to school visits or brochures. This is reinforced by the fact that none of the choosing parents mentioned visiting their intended school prior to making, or deciding to make, a request. This "contact hypothesis" is

continued when it is established that an (admittedly non-significant) difference exists on the "usefulness" of elder children as a source. It will be recalled that only two parents making choices did so on the basis of the experience of elder children, in contrast to nine choosing to remain with the catchment area school. This seems to suggest strongly that contact with the catchment area school is likely to lead not to becoming dissatisfied, but rather the opposite, to remaining with it.

Making reference to the types of information held by parents illustrates some curious paradoxes. In the main, those choosing to leave the catchment area school emphasised its lack of discipline, poor standards and teachers, yet it is difficult to see where the substance of such opinions could come from, given that it was likely that the parents had had no contact with the school concerned. Equally perplexing is the apparently consensual view that the intended schools were somehow better on these (and other) outcomes. Again, it is likely that parents had no prior contact with any of these schools. A possible explanation for these opinions will be advanced later in the chapter.

It is no surprise that significant differences emerged in how parents viewed Solsgirth, given the essentially similar dissatisfaction data mentioned above. Parents loyal to the school always sought to emphasise the quality of teaching and education on offer, one saying that it was "there for those who are prepared to learn". While all parents accepted that there were aspects of Solsgirth which caused them concern, several suggested that such issues were "overstated" and the school was "no worse than anywhere else". It is interesting that these non-choosing parents were also content to rate Fleets,

Shieldmains and Sheriffyards equally highly as those choosing these other schools. This seems to suggest once again that dissatisfaction has to be present, since a positive view of other schools did not lead directly to choice. It must, of course, be remembered that, as a group, the staying parents had no more nor less contact with other schools in the area, but that they had more contact with Solsgirth, the catchment area school.

An interesting perception was offered by several parents both among choosers and stayers. They felt that, to a greater or lesser extent, the problems faced by Solsgirth were being transferred with the children to Fleets. One parent felt that it was increasingly unlikely that a true integration could take place between the working class children of the Solsgirth area and the more (perceived) middle class children of Fleets. In fact, neither school had reported this to be a problem, nor was it mentioned as having been a problem for children in previous years.

The perceived "class" of schools was not surprisingly varied. In general Solsgirth was perceived as a school for the working class in their own area. Fleets, on the other hand, perhaps holding a little of its former status was seen as a "better school" in a "better area", the net effect being seen to be a "better class" of children. It is clear that egalitarian views of human worth had not permeated far in this area. In one or perhaps two cases, this view was transparently exaggerated to reinforce the perceived jump in status being accomplished by the child (or perhaps the parents - see below).

Thus, to summarise the information elements of the questionnaire, it seems clear that parents' decisions, particularly to make a request, were not

founded on a factual information base, rather on hearsay, and were directly affected by elements of post hoc rationalisation. The paradox emerged that prior contact with the supposedly "problem" school did not lead to dissatisfaction. Rather the opposite, those with contact were significantly more likely to choose to stay.

### Choosing Behaviour

Analysis of choosing behaviour follows logically from the foregoing comments. At this stage the questions relating to valued outcomes will be addressed. A large summary table of such outcomes was constructed, split into choosers and stayers. A series of 2 x 2 contingency tables was created and several phi - coefficients calculated. (Essentially these are chi squared/n and for significance testing purposes can be treated similarly.)

Table 6.14 : Differences between choosers and stayers

Outcome	Sig Level	Favouring
Discipline	.05	choosers
Teachers	ns	
Exams	.05	choosers
Range of subjects	.001	stayers
Basic Education	ns	
Life Preparation	.001	stayers
Uniforms Policy	.01	choosers
Secure Future	ns	
Child Happy	ns	
Proximity	ns	
Help with Problems	ns	

From these statistics, several interesting points emerge. Firstly, there were

significant differences on 5 of the 11 dimensions (n.b. these were the outcomes rated as important by a significant number of the sample and reported at b2a - table 6.4 - above). These were : examinations; discipline; preparation for life; range of subjects and uniform. What makes the differences particularly interesting is that three favoured choosers, while two favoured stayers.

The three favoured by choosers were examinations, discipline and uniforms. There is little doubt that these dimensions form a group of concerns perhaps best described as traditionalist. Clearly too, they tie in well with both the expressed reasons for dissatisfaction with Solsgirth, which, it will be recalled, focussed on discipline and academic standards. On the other hand, stayers' preferences for "preparation for life" and "range of subjects" clearly belong to a group of concerns which could be seen as more "holistic". They could also be considered to be more "realistic" in outlook, and may also reflect differing academic aspirations among the staying group, but this is surmise. It should also be noted that only one of the choosing parents mentioned that they felt that the child should be happy as a specific outcome. One further parent, although suggesting that there was "some merit" in children being happy at school, nevertheless stated that this must always take second place to discipline. There were no significant differences in other core dimensions, namely teachers and basic education (the three r's). In summary, therefore, it would appear that choosers valued control and academic outcomes, while stayers seemed to favour sub-academic or holistic values - preparing their children for life after school.



Expressed reasons for choice also showed a marked divergence between choosers and stayers. Dealing first with choosers, primary reasons for choice can be broken down into a number of essentially discrete categories. Two of these categories account for the bulk of the choices. The first is broadly "social". This included such reasons as "better class of children", "better area" and even "clever kids go there". These are extra-curricular, and indeed extra-school, in the sense that they are areas over which a school has no control, since these are almost completely dictated by its catchment area. Obviously, being in a working class area, Solsgirth was very likely to suffer as a consequence of such thinking. Although there was no evidence in the study to confirm this, it may well be that these parents perceived themselves as being either not working class or as upwardly mobile. This view was certainly ascribed to them by parents choosing to stay with Solsgirth. (However, this issue would be a separate study in itself.)

The second broad category of division can be characterised as "discipline". This needs little more explanation, except in so far as to note the congruence with stated reasons for dissatisfaction, and with valued outcomes.

The third category contains those whose decisions were based solely on the threat to Solsgirth. Beyond these categories, there were only three parents who chose for individual specific reasons.

**Table 6.15(a) : Primary Reasons for Choice (Choosers)**

	n	%age
Discipline	10	40
Social	9	36
Closure	3	12
Other	3	12

Among those opting to remain with the catchment area school there were also broad categories into which parents' justifications could be grouped. Principal among these was a general satisfaction with the school itself. Among comments were "teachers as good as any", "no complaints" and "I'm happy with Solsgirth". Beyond this, one parent opted for the closest school, one thought all schools equally bad, while the final parent could offer no particular reasons. Two sub-categories are worthy of note, however. Seven parents cited the experience of their elder children as important factors in their decision making process. This of course ties in with the issues related to contact raised above. As well as one parent citing it as a main reason, three more parents mentioned proximity as a consideration, albeit a secondary one.

**Table 6.15(b) : Primary Reasons for Choice (Stayers)**

	n	%age
Satisfied	14	70
(Experience	7	35)
Child Happy	3	15
Proximity	1	5
Other	2	10

Analysis of these categories brings a simple distinction between choosers and stayers. It appears essentially that the former group was avoiding aspects of their catchment area school. Certainly elements of their justifications were expressed in terms of the intended schools, but these

followed on from criticisms of Solsgirth on the same dimensions. It should also be remembered that generally parents had had no contact with, nor possessed specialised knowledge of, their intended school. It thus seems fair to suggest that parents were avoiding their catchment area school rather than being positively attracted to an alternative. This can be held to be the case for a minimum of 22 of the parents opting for other schools.

Parents opting to remain with the catchment area school, on the other hand, could be said to have been attracted to elements of the catchment area school itself. This hypothesis is supported by the evidence of their general satisfaction mentioned above. It thus seems that a key issue in parental choice in this area of Edinburgh is approach - avoidance with the motivating factor being dissatisfaction. Before discussing recipient schools, it should be noted that only four parents considered more than one other school. Of these, three in fact chose to remain with the catchment area school, two having considered a choice and rejected it on reassessing the threat to Solsgirth, and the third having been sufficiently swayed by the school brochure as to decide against a move (to Sheriffyards). The fourth parent was, as noted above, a special case in considering the invitation to make a placing request as a free choice. He claimed to have considered Solsgirth on an equal footing with the others but, although he had "heard good things", decided Fleets seemed a better bet. This stands alone among the 45 justifications for choice as one which would be expected under an expectancy type model. None of the other 24 parents who made choices considered more than one alternative school.

While on the surface it seems logical to expect that parents would maximise their "gain" or "happiness" in terms of a choice of school, as seen, this was not the case. Parents were concerned primarily with avoiding their catchment area school. The second assumption is that people (a) have access to and (b) are willing to collect information about schools. Again this is not the case. Parents do not appear to have a willingness to seek out, even by visiting, information about intended schools.

These disparate strands of evidence can be neatly tied together with reference to Simon's notion of satisficing (op cit, Chapter 2). Parents, in avoiding their catchment area schools, chose the first school which appeared not to be as bad as that which they sought to avoid. At this the search, if it could be so called, stopped. Parents satisficed. They did not optimise.

The next chapter will present the evidence from the Third Study. Subsequently, the penultimate chapter, Chapter 8, will represent a drawing together of all available evidence, both internal and external, with a view to offering both a model and an explanation of parental choice behaviour. The final chapter will attempt to set this model in its political and social context.

## CHAPTER 7

### Evidence From The Third Study

The aims of this Third Study are best seen as essentially complementary to those of the Second. It will be recalled that the Second Study did not set out to explore all the aspects of parental choice as delineated by the proposed model outlined in Chapter 3. Its purpose was to explore the nature of the information held by parents and to assess its interaction with the decision process. The study was avowedly qualitative in nature, seeking to assess the perceptions of the parents, their views and justifications. Many pointers were gained to issues to be explored in this Third Study, not least in the nature of the expressed justifications for the choices actually made by parents.

This study set out to further explore aspects of the choice decision. It did so in a quantitative way and using the paradigm of expectancy theory as outlined in Chapters 2 and 3. It used the method of the self-completed "mailed" questionnaire. Its ultimate aim was to produce a model of parental choice using this paradigm which satisfied the aim of being predictive, while still remaining usefully explanatory.

### Overview of the Chapter

The structure will follow that of the two previous analytical chapters (5 and 6). Initially a justification will be offered for the method employed.

This will include a description of the purpose of each of the 14 questions. Subsequently, the data will be reported and its quality assessed. The analysis phase will contain a variety of statistical treatments of the obtained data attempting to assess the worth of both the approach as a whole and of its constituent parts. The chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of the main findings. The subsequent chapter (8) will comprise a discussion of parental choice in the light of the studies, and attempt to offer a new model.

### The Choice of Schools

It was noted in the discussion of the Second Study that care should be taken in generalising from the data due to the singular nature of the research area. It was partly with this limitation in mind that the choice of schools for the Third Study was wider, to include three primaries from areas which, although adjoining, could not be considered homogeneous, either as a unit or as a whole. The decision to include the three previously studied Solsgirth primary schools was taken to allow a continuity in the research between the two studies. In practical terms, these schools had already been established as cooperative and welcoming. Between the period of the Second and Third Studies, Solsgirth had been granted a reprieve from closure (April 1984). This meant that Solsgirth was a viable choice for parents with the "threat" of closure lifted.

### Choosing a Sample

It will be recalled that the sample group for the Second Study consisted of parents of children then in primary 7, that is those who would transfer to secondary school in August 1984. For the sample group for the Third Study, it was decided to approach parents of those children then in primary 6, i.e. those who would be due to start at their secondary schools in the August of 1985. This was done for a number of reasons.

In discussions with parents interviewed for the Second Study, it became clear that parents made up their minds at different times, and in the specific case of Solsgirth, often very early indeed, thanks to the publicity surrounding the proposed closure. This caused the issue to be very salient at a time before it was thought that the parents would have given any consideration to the issue. This would, of course, have made it impossible to conduct a "predictive" Second Study in any real sense, since the decision had already been taken and indeed acted upon in some cases. This would have been the case again, only more so, if further primary 7 parents had been approached. It would have been impossible to approach them before April or May and thus all would have implemented their decisions. A second reason of course would have been that the target sample for three of the schools (those central to the Second Study) would have been exactly the same. For these reasons, and essentially to allow a prediction to be made, and to keep the variables as free from post-hoc rationalisation as possible, it was decided to approach the parents of those children in primary 6 at the target date.

There was no reason to suspect that for the majority of parents the decision was not salient even at that early stage. The publicity given particularly to the issue of the proposed closure of Solsgirth had given the parents in the area a heightened awareness of the issue of parental choice. As for the parents in the various Fleets areas, it was hoped to discover the salience of the issues involved empirically by means of parts of the questionnaire. In the final analysis, the parents who returned the questionnaire were likely to be the ones for whom the decision was salient anyway. The sample self-selected by salience.

The use of primary 6 parents produced logistic problems for the use of "behaviour" as the criterion variable. The likely timescale for their applications to be made (let alone accepted) would have been late January 1985, too late to be useful to this research (carried out in Spring 1984). Allied to this problem was the fact that in order to guarantee anonymity parents were given unnumbered and unaddressed questionnaires. This ruled out specific second approaches, and meant that the criterion variable in this study would be "expressed intention".

From the modelling point of view this was not really a problem. As Kerr (1982) pointed out, there is often a substantially lower correlation between EV and behaviour than that between EV and intention (see also Fischbein and Ajzen, 1975). This is a compelling argument. As the elapsed time between questionnaire administration and actual application grows, so the possibility of the intervention of other things increases. This could be anything from a memory lapse or a change of mind through illness to some family crisis. A predictive model of behaviour using behaviour as a



criterion variable may therefore be substantially out of date and subject to all sorts of contamination by the time parents came to apply. The use of expressed intention at once increased the likely accuracy of this type of model, although perhaps slightly devaluing its power to explain.

From a pragmatic point of view, the use of intention as the criterion had positive advantages for the issue of salience. As discussed above, it was problematic how salient the decision was to individual parents, even given that the ones who would reply were likely to be the ones for whom the decision was salient. The use of intention was useful in that the decision was treated as hypothetical for the purposes of modelling, and thus, given that the parents were informed of their rights at the outset, it could be assumed that a completed questionnaire would be an indication of at least "artificial salience". This is essentially a working hypothesis.

This decision was not unprecedented. Kerr (1982) in his study of the take up of supplementary benefits by pensioners controlled for salience by informing those eligible pensioners of their right to benefit in advance and, further, giving them an indication of the likely amount they would receive should they make an application. However, the likelihood that pensioners had not heard of their rights was, in fact, somewhat higher than among the parents in this study.

#### Method of Approach

Before describing the method of approach it is useful to first review the technique used in the Second Study. Given that the stated aim of the study

was an in-depth examination of the levels of information and justifications for choice in individuals, it was appropriate to use an interview technique. With these aims, and a sample size of about 50, this was both appropriate and practical. This format was ideal to explore issues which arose since its goal was not a standardised single "answer". However, as stated above, the aims of this Third Study were somewhat different. In order to produce a statistically significant predictive model, a sample larger than 50 would ideally be required. It would be crucial also that homogeneity of administration be preserved as far as possible both in terms of presentation and timing in order that essentially the same issues faced all parents at the point of completion. An in-depth interview technique may prove to be inappropriate when the goal is just such a unified outcome. This may be for a number of reasons. Firstly, the presence of an interviewer could have led to variance in the administration of the questions and supplying of prompts. Secondly, a main plank of such a standardised approach would be the fact that all questionnaires would be completed at broadly the same time, thus ensuring that issues subsequently arising did not alter perceptions. Thirdly, and related to the second point, the administration of around 280 questionnaires would have led to many practical difficulties.

While accepting the obvious advantages of the self-completed questionnaire in terms of these three points, certain limitations must be acknowledged. As teachers teach at the pace of the slowest pupil, so questionnaires must not assume a high level of accomplishment among respondents. Questions must therefore be relatively simple and uncomplicated since the opportunity for further explanation would not be available. Thus some data

quality must be conceded to practical considerations. Similarly, a balance must be struck between the (usually) large range of questions posed by the aims of the research and the physical length of the questionnaire. Such a balance is very much a matter of diminishing returns since a long mailed questionnaire is not likely to produce as many responses as a shorter one. Such questionnaires can also lead to problems should an across-persons design be adopted, specifically in the area of shared and individual meaning of constructs. The approach essentially defines that all meanings are shared. The present research, in adopting a generally within-person approach, sidesteps such a problem since the individual can assume any meaning - it is the individual's subjective perception and its relationship to his/her individual decision which is important.

Itzen (1985) noted that, in approaching parents, while 95% agreed to be interviewed having been contacted by telephone, only 25% responded to a written request. The experience of the Second Study (Chapter 6) certainly does not contradict the general drift of these findings and thus it was with limited but realistic expectations that a sampling frame was devised. In total between the six schools selected for study there were 283 pupils in primary 6. It was decided to approach every parent. In order to try to minimise non-returns, the questionnaires were passed to parents via the primary six child in an envelope already addressed to the primary school. Enclosed was a letter explaining in simple terms the choice parents would be faced with in December 1985:

*Dear Parent*

*In a few months time, parents whose children are now in P6 will be given the chance to decide which secondary school they would prefer their child to attend from August 1985. As you may know, it is only recently that the law has given parents the right to make this choice. At the moment very little is known about what parents think about their local school and what makes parents choose the schools they do. By completing this questionnaire you will be contributing to an understanding of these very important issues.*

*I am a research worker at Edinburgh University and have the full permission of Lothian Region Education Department and the Headteacher of your child's school to carry out this study. I have written to every parent who has a child in Primary 6 at this, and five other local primary schools and hope to get a good response.*

*Nothing you say in this questionnaire will be shown to anyone in school or the Education Department and none of the information will be used for anything other than this research project.*

*As soon as you have completed the questionnaire, please return it (in the envelope provided) to your child's primary school. Thank you very much for your time and trouble.*

*Yours sincerely*

It can thus be seen that this letter served not only to introduce the research and the questionnaire, but also to inform parents of their rights and thus to establish the knowledge element of salience at the outset. As noted above, this is somewhat less important in a postal questionnaire than in an interview given that it is likely that parents who are not interested, those for whom the decision is not salient, would fail to return the questionnaire. The questionnaire was not coded in any way, partly at the behest of Lothian Region Education Department, but also to reassure parents that they would not in any way jeopardise the chances of any request they intended to make being granted. It was decided to do this

In response to fears expressed by a small number of parents during the Second Study. That these fears were in fact groundless was, of course, irrelevant, it was the subjective perception which was crucial. On receipt, however, questionnaires were coded sequentially by school to facilitate analysis.

### The Questionnaire

The questionnaire contained fourteen questions. Clearly multiple choice questions have both advantages and drawbacks. Their advantages lie in their ease of completion, simplicity of analysis, and more generally in their increasing the likelihood of return, by minimising the actions required of the respondent. Their drawback is primarily in the limited amount of information they can access. In employing a postal methodology, therefore, the demands of information gathering had to be tempered by the need for simplicity. The majority of questions were broadly multiple choice. As will be seen, however, several of the questions contained supplementary sections requiring a fuller response, but these were so designed to be, with one exception, in pursuit of additional information - the information base being satisfied by the multiple choice answer alone.

The scope of the questions was wide ranging. (The questionnaire is reproduced as an appendix.) As can be seen, the first two questions deal broadly with the issue of salience and provide a means of establishing its existence directly.

Question 3 assessing valued outcomes represents the key question in the approach. Elliot et al (1981) isolated a number of specific issues which were of concern to parents. While several were local or particularly English, a number were of obvious wider relevance and these formed the basis of the protocol of the Pilot Study, and were subsequently refined in the light of the experience of this and the Second Study. The nineteen outcomes presented here and in questions 7 and 8 are, in effect, shorthand for a wider definition. Since they will be referred to at various points in this and subsequent chapters, it may be useful to detail them here.

Table 7.1 : Outcomes with Brief Definition

Buildings	: condition and suitability of accommodation
Staff	: school staff are efficient and competent
Visit	: school encourages parents to visit
Behaviour	: pupils are well behaved
Uniforms	: school insists uniforms be worn
Staff Dress	: school does not permit casual dress
Academic Standards	: high
Range of Subjects	: wide range offered
Community Involvement	: pupils encouraged to become involved
Proximity	: school is close to home
Site	: school is at one location
Familiarity	: pupils are on familiar terms with teachers
3 r's	: school emphasises the three r's
Religious Education	: supported by the school
Sports	: offered and encouraged by the school
Small Classes	: throughout the school
Respect	: pupils respect the staff
Examinations	: school does not focus exclusively on exams
Happy Atmosphere	: prevalent in the school

These can be broadly grouped into four categories : control, social, environmental and academic. A four point scale was chosen for this question. This was done in the light of studies (see Chapter 2)

demonstrating that respondents view negatively valent events as "all or nothing". The scale is thus bi-polar with a zero, two positives and a single negative point. More generally, this question formed the basis of the valence formulation of the model, in that it clearly served as an indication of an "Ideal" school and could thus be interpreted as the extent to which a parent considered any of the particular outcomes to be valued.

Ideally, parents should have been asked to provide their own outcomes for rating. In practice, in both the Pilot and Second Studies it proved difficult for parents to do this without the use of examples and, in many cases, some coaching. The present solution is perhaps a compromise in providing an opportunity for strong or individualistic views to be raised.

Questions 7 and 8 form the basis of the model formulation. In the course of both Pilot and Second studies, a number of different approaches were tried to assess instrumentality. The use of the "Report Card" format, however, seemed to be the correct approach, in that parents could readily grasp the meaning of "A"'s and "E"'s from either their own or their children's experiences. (It should be noted at this point that this method was particularly successful in the present study). The question itself had two uses. Primarily it indicated the instrumentality perceived for the catchment area school. Secondly, however, it measured parents' levels of dis/satisfaction with the catchment area school. Dissatisfaction is the difference between the rating of the catchment area school and the rating of an ideal school established by question three.

It will be recalled from the previous chapter that the issue of school contacts was raised. A question was included in the present research to try to assess whether there was a wider relevance for such a contact hypothesis.

The decision to include two opportunities for parents to expand on answers (questions 10c and 14) seemed a compromise between foregoing information by excessive simplicity and the corollary of diminishing returns. In the event, the responses to these two questions produced at least as rich data as the model specific questions and their analysis will form a discrete section of this chapter.

In addition to the foregoing, the questionnaire covered all aspects of the experimental model outlined in Chapter 3. In keeping with the philosophy outlined at that stage of accommodating the pursuit of alternative explanations, several of the questions were set suitably wide ranging. However, not all of the issues raised by the Pilot and Second studies could be accommodated within the limited length.

## Results and Analysis

### Overview

It will be recalled that the aim of this study was to reach a significant number of parents using a single questionnaire suitable for computer analysis. In this, the study was successful. Of 283 parents approached, 110 usable questionnaires were obtained. This represents a final response rate



of 38.87%, which is satisfactory for a postal questionnaire. The raw figure was rather higher, since 10 of the questionnaires were rejected as incomplete or unusable, through having no means of assessing the criterion variable, and a further three which, although complete, were returned well after data analysis had begun. (n.b. The statistical programme used, SCSS, did not allow the addition of further data after entering the analysis phase). Thus the raw response rate was a little over 43%. The distribution of returns is given below.

Table 7.2 : Distribution of Returns

Primary school attended	Received	Sent	%
Cartshore	31	40	77.5
Cardowan	32	50	64.0
Bardykes	9	50	18.0
Fortacres	14	28	50.0
Burghlea	16	73	21.9
Fleets	8	42	19.0
	---	---	----
	110	283	38.9

It will be observed that the spread of response rates was quite large. (The onset of school summer holidays prevented further reminders being sent). It is difficult to shed any light on why this should have been, since each school employed an identical methodology and no evidence was forthcoming on unauthorised changes. Since the data will be for the most part used either individually or aggregated to secondary school level, the spread is not as important as it may have been in other circumstances.

### Quality of Data

When assessing the quality of the data generated by the responses it should be borne in mind that a null response to certain items indicated that the construct was irrelevant and thus the issue is more complicated than were it merely a case of counting empty boxes. To an extent, therefore, any judgement will be subjective. This section will deal briefly with each of the questions in turn, discussing its success or otherwise in achieving its end. No analysis of implications will be considered at this stage. In this context, "all" is taken to represent the 110 respondents whose questionnaires were accepted for analysis.

Questions 1 and 2 (dealing with level of thought and previous choice behaviour) were answered successfully by all respondents. The rubric to question 3 (valences of specific outcomes) instructed parents to use a null response to any items they thought were irrelevant or to which they did not know the answers. An "empty" box, therefore must be interpreted in the light of this. In the event there were proportionately fewer empty boxes in this question than in questions 7 and 8 (instrumentalities) but this is not at all surprising - see below. The maximum number of blanks per questionnaire was 14 while a fair number contained none at all. The mode (the most useful statistic in the circumstances) was 4 and subjectively this seems to indicate the question was understood and completed successfully. Too high a modal number of empty boxes might have indicated either that the question was not salient or that it had been misperceived as asking for, say, only the most important. There was no obvious reluctance to use the extremities of the scale, although it must

be accepted that the use of the negative (4 on the scale) would be circumscribed by the respondents' perceptions of the issues.

Perhaps not surprisingly, fewer than 10% of the respondents offered alternative outcomes (question 4). In no cases did they shed any further light, since the categories offered were either subsumed by those given in question 3 or related to specific circumstances prevalent at individual schools. If these outcomes had been decisive for individual parents they would have been repeated in question 10 (the criterion variable and specific justifications). In the event, none were.

All respondents to question 5 perceived there to be differences between schools on at least one of the offered dimensions. Had this not been the case it would have been necessary to be somewhat sceptical of responses to questions 3, 7 and 8, since if no differences were perceived, answers to 7 and 8 should logically have been identical, if different to those for 3.

The strictures on "empty" boxes applied equally to question 7 (instrumentality of catchment area school). In this context a number of parents checked only A grades which, while not strictly what was asked by the question, nevertheless was valid as establishing those on which salience was highest in making choices and assessment. Thus empty boxes would be classed as "irrelevant outcomes". There was no reluctance to use either extremity of the scale - a fact evinced by the fact that several of the outcomes had mean grades below "C", thus the catchment area school was being considered to be "below average" on its provision. Subjectively, the information obtained was useful and easily sufficient for its purpose.

57 parents (52%) offered ratings for a second school (question 8). 38 of these respondents intended to make a placing request for that school. Thus 19 parents whose children were intended to attend the catchment area school appeared to consider more than one school. (Care had to be taken in coding the question since a small group of respondents had repeated their ratings for the catchment area school). None of the respondents indicated that they had considered more than two schools.

It will be recalled that question 10 was a three stage question. The first part of the question formed the criterion for the whole study and thus it was essential that a good response be obtained. In the event, 109 of the useable questionnaires had a clear statement of the intended school. Although the other was ambiguous, the intended school could be easily inferred from the positive response to question 7 (Instrumentality of catchment area school). Among the 10 rejected questionnaires such inferences were not possible even in cases where some useable data did exist. The second part of the question partly provided a check on the first, in asking parents to state whether the school they had nominated in part 1 was in fact the catchment area school. Again, 109 valid (and correct) responses were made to this question. The third stage of the question was answered by a surprisingly large number of parents - 87. To reiterate, the question asked parents to state their reasons for choice. As will be shown below, much useful insight was gained from this question.

While it had not been expected that many people would respond to question 14 (Inviting them to raise any other educational issues), in the event 22

did. The usefulness of the responses was rather varied but, where relevant, use will be made of them in the analysis below.

Thus it may be seen that a large body of data was collected and available for use. The mechanics of the computer programme used - SCSS - imposed certain limitations on the number of items which could be coded. Thus to accommodate all 110 responses, only 68 items of data per questionnaire could be included. This constraint was not considered to be serious as the system placed no limitation on the number of secondary variables which could be created. The main effect was to compress the items in questions 9 and 5. The former became a dichotomy, the latter a three point scale.

The data and analysis sections of this chapter will comprise initially a profile of respondents, followed by an exposition of the substantive issues of the study. A brief discussion of these will be followed by analysis and discussion pertaining to material gained through responses to question 10. The final section of the chapter will attempt to point the way forward to the integrated analysis of parental choice to be offered in chapter 8.

### Profile

This section will deal with the characteristics of the sample in terms of biographical data. It will be remembered that children attended six primary schools in two secondary school catchment areas. It seems useful at this point to more fully define "choosers" and "stayers" - the two basic units of analysis throughout the chapter.

#### a.Choosers

These were the parents who nominated a school in answer to question 10 which was not that to which their child would normally be allocated. Thus among parents living in the area of Solsgirth High School, whose children attended there, one nominating Fleets would be considered a "chooser". Although no Catholic parents emerged in the study, it is as well to point out that they are classed as having dual catchment area schools, their non-denominational school particular to their home address or similar Catholic school. (n.b. this note applies particularly to Lothian Region. One authority in Scotland (Strathclyde) allocates catchment areas by attendance at feeder primaries (see for example University of Glasgow, 1986.))

#### b.Stayers

Those parents who, in response to question 10, nominated a school which would normally be that allocated by the Education Authority, bearing in mind the qualifications noted above.

**Table 7.3 Choosers and Stayers**

Primary School	Secondary School			
	Solsgirth		Fleets	
	Choosers	Stayers	Choosers	Stayers
Gartshore	13	18		
Cardowan	10	22		
Bardykes	5	4		
Burghlea			5	11
Fortacres			10	4
Fleets			5	3
	28	44	20	18
	72		38	

Choosers = 48

Stayers = 62

Perhaps the first point to be noted from the table is the relative representation of choosers and stayers among the sample. Choosers represent 43.6% of the sample, stayers 56.4%. On the surface this would appear to be somewhat skewed in favour of choosers since, city wide, in the years prior to 1984 choice had run at around 20% of those eligible. However, in the study area, Solsgirth and Fleets, the ratio of choosers to stayers had been closer to 1:1 in the former and 1:3 in the latter. Thus in the Solsgirth section of the sample, the bias is, if anything in favour of stayers. Certainly, in the Fleets sample there does appear to be a slight over-representation of choosers. However, this is easily explained with reference to the Burghlea sub sample. In the previous year, 73 out of 75 children from Burghlea transferred to their catchment area school, Fleets, and thus, to have encountered 5 choosers in the present sample may suggest that circumstances had changed in the area. In terms of the

relationship between Solsglirh and Fleets, 25% of the sample of Solsglirh parents intended to transfer to Fleets, perhaps a slight under-representation, but again acceptable.

#### The Sallence of the Issue

While it was assumed that levels of sallence among those returning the questionnaire would be acceptably high by virtue of their having taken the trouble at all, the following table (7.4), illustrating answers to the question assessing levels of thought about parental choice, offers supporting evidence :

Table 7.4 Level of Thought

"a great deal"	41	37.3%
"quite a lot"	54	49.1%
"a little"	15	13.6%
"none"	0	
	---	
	110	

These statistics certainly suggest that for the sample the issue was not new, was salient and that credence could be given to their responses.

Twenty five parents had made requests for other of their children to a different primary or secondary school than the one they would otherwise have attended (which may or may not have been a "placing request" depending on the year of the request). However, this proved, perhaps surprisingly, to be a barren area of study since, there were no differences



between this group, and those who had never made choices before, on any of the dimensions addressed by the research.

### Who Decides?

In the Pilot Study (see Chapter 5), one respondent suggested that the choice decision was best left to education professionals. There was no evidence of such a view in the Third Study. Of 105 valid responses 102 contained "parent" somewhere in the answer. Of those which did not, one, as seen, nominated an unspecified "other".

Table 7.5 Identity of Final Chooser

	n	%
Parent	36	34
School	1	1
LEA	2	2
Parent and School	55	52
Parent and LEA	10	9
Other	1	1

Two did, however, nominate the "Education Authority". It would be wrong to read too much into this since both intended to make a placing request and thus it must be assumed that the qualification "final" in terms of responsibility was uppermost in their minds. There is no evidence to suggest that any parent felt that the final say should have rested with their children, (which was offered as one of the alternatives in the question) although, in response to question 10, a number mentioned that their child's choice had been different from their own. In these cases it

seems fair to assume that the choice, while suboptimal to the parent, was nevertheless acceptable.

Within the home, 50% of parents stated that decision were made jointly between father and mother. Clearly a substantial proportion of the other respondents would be single parents and thus it would be problematic to infer that "one or other" parent was responsible in those cases. More clearly, only one parent explicitly mentioned the child as a partner in the decision process, although a further 10 said that the whole family was involved.

#### Perceived Exclusions

In one sense, a feeling that a request might not be granted may operate like a threshold, in that those parents would be unlikely to make such a placing request. Only three parents perceived there to be any chance that their child would not attend their chosen school, two of whom were choosers opting for Sherliffyards although accepting that it might be "full". (The third suggested that private education was a likely destination for their child.) Perhaps more interesting is that 14 parents checked "request may be refused" in response to question 11 yet still gave, in twelve cases, positive responses to question 12 (likelihood of child starting at the nominated school). This suggests clearly that some perception of failure did not deter parents from making an application. It is, of course, impossible to say how many (if any) of the stayers were deflected from considering a request because of low expectation, but it is difficult to see how this might have been accurately measured. [Adler and

Raab, (1988), did, in fact, demonstrate that the imposition of admission limits to three Edinburgh schools led to a substantial reduction in requests for them, thus lending support to the hypothesis.]

There seemed little evidence of situational constraints to making a request. Only three parents checked "moving away from area", all of whom intended to make placing requests. Clearly in this case the probability of such movement was not high enough to prevent a request being made. (Consideration was given at the design stage to incorporating self-reported probability assessments in question 11, but this would have entailed 5 separate questions containing a box similar to that used in question 12 - certainly "will" to certainly "will not" on a 5 point scale - and this was felt to add more to the length and complexity of the questionnaire than to the usefulness of the information gained.)

### Dissatisfaction

While each of the foregoing has been a measured concept, dissatisfaction in this context is derived. In both the Pilot and Second Studies parents were asked directly to rate their own satisfaction (or otherwise) on a 1 - 5 scale. It will be recalled that question 3 in the present study invited parents to rate an ideal school, while question 7 asked them to rate their catchment area school. Dissatisfaction in this context is defined as the sum of the differences between the rated outcomes for the catchment area and 'ideal' schools as measured by questions 3 and 7.

$$\text{Dissatisfaction} = \sum_{i=1}^{19} (\text{Ideal} - \text{catchment})$$

or more properly :

$$D = \sum_{i=1}^{19} (V - 1)$$

Thus it may be seen that dissatisfaction is an a priori construct which nevertheless retains its "common" meaning. It is thus possible to classify parents as dissatisfied or otherwise in a straightforward fashion. Were parents therefore generally satisfied ?

Of 110 respondents, only two considered that their catchment area school satisfied the criteria implicit in their answers to question 3, one of whom was a chooser. A further 3 parents rated ideal and catchment area schools equally. The remainder (105) felt that their catchment area school fell short of the ideal, in some cases by a wide margin. It will be recalled that each of the 19 outcomes was rated on a 5 point scale, and highest level of dissatisfaction derived was around two scale points per outcome, a large shortfall by any standard. (The scale points were labelled "excellent", "very good", "average", "below average" and "poor"). The average score over all 110 respondents was around one point per outcome offered.

The result was not at all surprising given the presence of 48 choosers in the sample who would be expected to depress the average substantially if the dissatisfaction model is correct. Table 7.6 summarises this partiallying:

Table 7.5 Mean Levels of Dissatisfaction (partials)

	$\bar{x}$	n
Whole sample	-0.89	110
Choosers	-1.07	48
Stayers	-0.76	62
Solsgrith as c/a	-0.87	72
Fleets as c/a	-0.91	38

The first point to note is that the dissatisfaction hypothesis seems to be confirmed. There was a significant difference between choosers and stayers on this dimension. ( $t=3.50$   $df=108$   $p=.001$ ). It was proposed that dissatisfaction was a true threshold, in that an individually perceived level of dissatisfaction would be required to motivate choice, not a dichotomous presence or otherwise. This certainly seemed to be confirmed as well, in that a fairly large measure of dissatisfaction could be present without a request being made. As will be seen later, this may have been due to the existence of single overriding factors for choice - "trumps" (see below).

It would appear likely that dissatisfaction would be likely to be greater among parents in the Solsgrith catchment area bearing in mind its "reputation". This was not in fact borne out. (See table 7.6.) The difference in the mean scores does not approach significance. The reason for this statistic may be in the slightly higher proportion of choosers in the Fleets sample, this group being more likely to be dissatisfied and thus contributing to a lower overall rating. The spread of scores among Fleets parents was also rather tighter (s.d. 7.0 as against 10.3)

suggesting slightly less polarised views, a fact certainly borne out by the Second Study and responses to question 10 (below).

While this topic will be discussed further later in the chapter, it seems useful to summarise 'dissatisfaction' thus far. Evidence has been found for the existence of dissatisfaction as proposed in Chapter 3, both in terms of there being a highly significant difference between choosers and stayers, and in proving that a measure of dissatisfaction can be present without an automatic progression to the choice phase.

#### Overview of Outcomes

It will be recalled that 19 outcomes were offered to parents for rating. The scale used was in the form 2 to -1 as follows:

- 1 (2) This is one of the most important things about schools
- 2 (1) This matters but is not vital
- 3 (0) Irrelevant, or not at all important
- 4 (-1) I don't want this in a school

By this means a useful pool of data was established on the sorts of things parents viewed as important in schools. Of interest are two statistics relating to each outcome, firstly the mean, as an indication of the overall average strength of feeling, and secondly, the standard deviation, as an indication of the range of feeling. It would be tedious to list all scores on all outcomes, but a mean and standard deviation provide a useful summary. Briefly, the closer the mean approaches "2", the more highly

(positively) valued is the outcome. Conversely, the lower the standard deviation score, the larger the measure of agreement among the sample of parents. Ranks have been provided independently for both measures. (See above for the short definitions of the outcomes.)

Table 7.7 Overview of Outcomes

<u>outcome</u>	<u><math>\bar{x}</math></u>	<u>rank</u>	<u>s.d.</u>	<u>rank</u>	<u>no using -1*</u>
buildings	1.39	9	.592	7	0
staff	1.91	1	.347	1	0
visit encouraged	1.40	8	.609	8	0
behaviour	1.72	5	.509	5	0
uniforms	0.63	17	.715	15	7
staff dress	0.24	19	.693	14	11
academic standards	1.66	6	.566	6	0
range of subjects	1.84	3	.440	2	0
community inv'ment	1.16	11	.652	12	0
proximity	1.08	12	.679	13	0
site	0.66	15	.829	16	6
familiarity	0.63	17	1.082	19	25
3 rs	1.01	14	.904	18	7
religious ed'n	0.64	16	.629	9	2
sports	1.28	10	.637	10	0
small classes	1.47	7	.646	11	0
respect	1.81	4	.498	4	0
examinations	1.02	13	.835	17	9
happy atmosphere	1.86	2	.466	3	0

\*The number of parents rating the schools as "-1" i.e. don't want this outcome

The very high correlation (0.878) between ranks is not surprising given that a measure of agreement between parents was required in order to raise the mean score of a construct. The presence of negative scores (see extreme right column) would of course both depress the mean and increase the standard deviation.

Table 7.7a Most and Least Valued Outcomes

most valued		least valued	
1	good staff	1	casual staff dress
2	happy atmosphere	2	familiarity with staff
		3	uniforms
3	wide range		
4	respect for staff	4	religious education

Table 7.7b Highest Concord and Discord

concord		discord	
1	good staff	1	familiarity with staff
2	wide range	2	3 r's (basic education)
3	happy atmosphere	3	examinations policy
4	respect for staff	4	school is on one site

Several points appear worthy of note. Firstly the outcomes most highly rated were those most readily described as "traditional". With the exception of "happy atmosphere" each of the top six outcomes was academically based or impinged on academic progress. (The position of "behaviour" vis a vis social and academic is somewhat muddy and will be returned to later). Those generating the highest level of disagreement were perhaps predictable - pupils on familiar terms with staff, 3r's, examinations and uniforms policies.

There seemed to be two patterns emerging. The first was the dominance of traditional values, the second the wide disparity of opinions on issues readily identified with modern curricula and related ethos. The latter was made clearer when the nature of the outcomes was clarified viz :



- I) exams - school does not focus exclusively on preparing for exams
- II) 3 r's - school emphasises the three r's above all else
- III) uniforms - school insists on uniforms being worn
- IV) familiar - pupils are on familiar terms with their teachers

(I) and (IV) are positively related to the modern ethos and the converse of (II) and (III). These groupings seemed to suggest the existence of two schools of thought. These may equate to those of Elliot, "process" and "humanistic". (Elliot et al, 1981), a topic which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Some support for these observations is offered by an analysis of the data gathered for question three using factor analysis. To an extent of course, factor analysis is a far less exact science than it appears on the surface since much interpretative license can be used to try to "make sense" of factor loadings in terms that are easily relatable to independently verifiable constructs while in fact the data cannot support such assertions. The present analysis was perhaps ultimately inconclusive. However, a number of factors were derived with substantial loadings on pairs or groups of outcomes.

Table 7.8 Derived Factors

Factor 1	Happy atmosphere, good staff, respect for staff, wide range of subjects
Factor 2	Proximity, school is on one site
Factor 3	Community involvement, visits encouraged, religious education
Factor 4	Staff dress, familiarity with teachers
Factor 5	Uniforms, 3r's

It can be observed that each of these factors has a high face validity in terms of congruence of elements, and relates strongly to the foregoing analysis summarised in Table 7.8. The first of these factors accounted for three times as much variance as any of the others suggesting that it was the most powerful. It can be characterised as "general and traditionalist". On the other hand, it is interesting to find that the two outcomes dealing with broadly "getting to school" load heavily on a single factor (factor 3). Later in the chapter much will be made of this "proximity" justification for school choice. Adler and Raab (1986) found that the single best predictor of school choice was proximity, thus offering support to this finding. Similarly, the outcomes producing most disagreement between parents loaded on a factor characterised as "staff conduct" (factor 4).

The factor analysis was inconclusive in the sense that it did not add to the understanding already gained from the more rudimentary analysis above. Most disappointing was the finding that no useful factors could be derived separately for choosers and stayers. In fact, essentially the same factors emerged from analysis of the partial samples. This is supported by a t-test analysis of all nineteen outcomes using whether or not parents had made a choice of school as a dichotomous dependent variable. In this analysis only the importance ascribed to the proximity of the school showed any significant differences between the groups. ( $t = 3.22$   $p < 0.002$   $df = 108$ .) This is thus a clear indication that the parents of the sample were in accord in terms of the aspects of education they valued most highly, and that this accord extended to both choosers and stayers.

### The Choice Decision In Terms of the EV Model

This section will examine the operation of the Force Model proposed in Chapter 3. Its success, as discussed, was to be measured in terms of correct predictions. A benchmark of success would be the average of dichotomous studies of this type (over a wide range) assessed by Klein (1983) at 68%.

While 110 valid responses to questions three and seven were received, only 57 parents rated a second school. Of these, 38 (67%) were choosers and 19 stayers. The fact that so many stayers rated a second school raises important questions for the model, since it seems to contradict the findings of both the Pilot and Second studies. It will be recalled that of those interviewed for the Second Study, only one parent (not actually intending to make a placing request) considered more than one school. Why nineteen should have considered and subsequently rejected a second school in this study is perhaps a combination of two factors.

Firstly, it is possible that the invitation to rate a second school for the purposes of the questionnaire may have caused some to do so although they had not previously intended to do so. In each case, however, the identity of the second school was given, and in each case was a theoretical choice from the local area. A second possible reason relates to the parents interviewed previously. It may well be that a number of the parents were more "certain" that only one school had been considered than was warranted. The inference is lent support by the existence of "trump" factors, essentially sub-optimal, often masking factors, on which decisions

were actually based, rather than those given as justifications. Should a trump occur, being sub optimal, it is very likely that dissonance will occur and hence result in the statement that only one choice had been considered. (Trump factors will be discussed more fully in Section 2 below.)

At this point it is useful to reiterate the Force Model in preparation for its implementation. (For a fuller discussion, see Chapter 3). It will be recalled that a two stage model was developed by Vroom, the first, and most important stage being the products of valence and instrumentality summed over all outcomes (19 in this research) thus :

$$\text{Affect} = \sum_{i=1}^{19} (\text{valence} \times \text{Instrumentality})$$

This mathematical transformation gives what Vroom called the valence of the first order outcome. However, for clarity, it is labelled here as "affect", since that more readily conveys the nature of the derived constructs. In essence it is the strength of feeling towards, in this case, the individual school being the sum of all component parts. A strength of this implementation lies in the way in which non-salient outcomes are dealt with. As noted, question 3 established the salience of each of the 19 outcomes for each parent. Because the model is multiplicative, assigning a value of "zero" to such irrelevant outcomes means that each product is therefore zero. Thus irrelevant outcomes literally add nothing to the sum of products and are thus excluded for the affect score.

The second transformation causes the affect score to be weighted by the expectancy that such an outcome would be attainable thus :

$$F_i = f \sum_{j=1}^n [ ( E_{ij} \text{ affect}_{ij} ) ]$$

$F_i$  is the force to perform act  $i$

$E_{ij}$  is the expectancy that  $i$  will lead to  $j$

Affect $_{ij}$  is the valence of outcome  $j$

This is, with slightly altered terminology, Vroom's Force Model, and the one outlined in Chapter 3. In fact, the second transformation was somewhat less useful in this research than it may otherwise have been since only three parents, all choosers, considered it at all likely that a placing request would not be granted. In each case they rated their expectancy 4 out of 5. While not strictly a ratio scale, it seemed reasonable to interpolate 0.8 as the subjective probability estimate of their expectancy. In practical terms, this could make little difference. However, Adler and Bondi (1988) reported that, as a consequence of the imposition of intake limits on three Edinburgh schools, the incidence of placing requests in favour of these schools declined sharply, reflecting a perception that there was little point in making such a request. It is fair to assume that low expectancy would be found among these groups of parents. Among the present groups of parents no such perceptions were likely, given the then prevailing admissions policies. Thus, because of the almost uniform expectancy scores which lend nothing to the weight of the analysis, the prediction itself is made on the basis of the first model alone.

### Predictions from the Force Model

For each parent a score was derived for the affect on both of the schools rated. It was assumed that the school for which the force (affect moderated by expectancy) was highest would be chosen. (In order to provide an independent check on the contribution of expectancy, a test was run including it but the predictions remained the same.)

The first set of scores was derived for all 110 parents. It will be recalled that the criterion variable was the reported intention of the parent in regard of a placing request. This model predicted that 51 parents would remain with the catchment area school and 53 opt for another school. Four parents' scores were equal and were thus treated as unpredictable (missing data).

The model proved to be highly successful in predicting parents decisions. Some 79 correct and 25 mispredictions were made, representing a success rate of 76%. Curiously, if the weighting aspect of  $I$  multiplied by  $V$  were forgone and  $I$  plus  $V$  used instead, an increase of 1.1% was obtained in the predictive accuracy. This issue will be further dealt with below.

This version of the model is, in fact, a little artificial since only 58 parents actually rated more than one school. Thus the model is essentially testing whether the affect for the catchment area school was positive or negative. It might be expected that this would in fact inflate the successful predictions of those staying with the catchment area school. Table 7.9 presents a summary of the predictions obtained using only data

from those who rated two schools. The "correct" predictions are those in cells (go, go) and (stay, stay), and conversely those in (go, stay) and (stay, go) are incorrect

Table 7.9 Predictions

		Criterion		
		go	stay	
Prediction	go	29	10	
	stay	7	8	no prediction = 3 valid n = 54

Thus 37 correct and 17 incorrect predictions were obtained. There were three parents for whom no prediction could be made because their force scores were equal for both schools.

This represents a success rate of 69% which compares very closely with the average for predictive studies of this type reported by Klein (1983) - around 68%. It represents a fall of 7% on the formulation including all 110 parents. The following table presents a comparison of the success of the two approaches in each of the cells :

Table 7.10 Comparison of Models

Cell	n=110	n=57
go - go	31	29
stay - stay	43	8
go - stay	12	10
stay - go	10	7

This table neatly confirms the speculation made in the previous section. The variance is almost entirely attributable to the inclusion in the first model of parents rating only one school. Each of the other cells is largely unaffected by the partialling out of this group. This is intuitively sensible, and makes a clear case for the exclusion of this group. The implications of this will be further discussed below.

A further issue was raised by investigation of the components of the "predictions" table. There was in fact a clear and significant difference between choosers and stayers in terms of the rates of success in predicting their actions even after the partialling of those who rated only one school.

Table 7.11 Comparison of Choosers and Stayers : Prediction Rates

	Correct	n	%success
Choosers	29	36	80.5
Stayers	8	18	44.5
Non-prediction		3	

This difference may indicate that the model as implemented is more valid for choosers than stayers. It is, in fact, the magnitude of the difference which is surprising, even although some variation was expected because of staying parents rating schools when otherwise they would not have done so. The reason for the disparity lies in the way the parents not intending to make a placing request have rated the instrumentality aspects of their local school. It will be recalled that no significant differences were found



between choosers and stayers on the valence dimension. Thus the differences must lie within the instrumentality dimension. What has, in effect, happened is that 18 parents who will not make a request have rated a school other than their chosen more highly than it.

This is an issue of some concern, since it seems to suggest that the model is differentially effective for the two groups of parents. Clearly it would be unwise to infer any process or indeed an explanation from this model when such an important aspect as rational maximisation is undermined. Thus while this model was successful in achieving an acceptable rate of predictive accuracy, it was nevertheless apparent that some measure of improvement was possible, particularly in terms of addressing the decisions of those parents mis-predicted by the model.

#### An Alternative view of the Data

Throughout the foregoing analysis it will have become clear that the valence and expectancy aspects of the model have, relatively, a lesser part to play in assessing the decisions than does the instrumentality aspect. To explore this, a predictive analysis was conducted in the manner of those above using only the instrumentality aspects of the formulation. Not surprisingly, a slight increase in predictive accuracy was found (+1% for the n=110 sample). This seems to clarify that the valence dimensions actually add only error variance to the model. Since, in fact, only 57 parents provided assessments of more than one school, it is useful to concentrate on the instrumentality ratings for the catchment area school

alone in order to try to establish a model of choice from the data obtained from all 110 parents in the sample.

Throughout the three research projects, a substantial body of evidence was collected, illustrating the apparent existence of a threshold of dissatisfaction. With this in mind, an alternative model was created which addressed the decisions of all 110 parents, rather than the 57 for whom the Force Model was applicable using the *a priori* definition of dissatisfaction described earlier in this chapter.

The Dissatisfaction Model assumed that those parents who were essentially satisfied would not consider a choice of alternative school. The two models would not, in all circumstances, address the same decision. Essentially, the Dissatisfaction Model asked whether a choice would be considered, the Force Model asked which school would be chosen.

For the purposes of the model, the derived index of dissatisfaction calculated (and reported) above was used, with the addition of a second transformation. The raw index was divided by the number of outcomes rated, thus giving a fairer index of *strength* of feeling. Once again, irrelevant outcomes were excluded, as for the Force Model.

To operate as a threshold, it was considered likely that the trigger level for each parent would be different. Clearly if this level of dissatisfaction could be accurately assessed it would be simple to identify the point at which progression to choice would occur. In fact this would be very difficult to achieve in practice. The present research addressed the gross

level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. For many parents it was likely that this gross level was substantially in excess of the trigger point at which choice would be considered. The identification of the hinging point was crucial to its success, and despite the operation of dissatisfaction as an incremental threshold, the most valid way to treat a predictive model was to regard dissatisfaction as either present or not. Thus, those whose weighted dissatisfaction index (derived as above) was positive, (thus indicating, somewhat paradoxically, that they were satisfied), would not be predicted to make a choice; those whose index was negative would be predicted to make a choice. Formally thus :

- a. If a parent's index of dissatisfaction was positive, no placing request would be predicted.
- b. If a parent's index of dissatisfaction was negative, a placing request would be predicted.
- c. If a parent's index of dissatisfaction was zero, no prediction could be made.

In the same way as for the Force Model, a comparison was made between the prediction and criterion variable for each parent. Table 7.13 presents a summary of the results.

Table 7.13 Predictions from the Dissatisfaction Model

		Criterion		
		go	stay	
Prediction	go	31	12	
	stay	10	43	No prediction = 14 Valid n = 96

Reading from the table, 74 correct and 22 incorrect predictions were made. In 14 cases, no prediction could be made. This represents a success rate in prediction of 77.1%, again better than the average reported by Klein (op cit).

It would be invalid to assess the significance of the difference in success rates between the two models since they are founded in such different assumptions and are quite different in the samples they address. In this context, however, it is possible to make a case for why the Dissatisfaction Model is better than the Force Model.

It will be recalled from discussion of the Force Model that it seemed to be differentially valid for the two groups. Analysis of the same breakdown produces somewhat different results for the Dissatisfaction Model. Table 7.14 summarises these findings :

Table 7.14 : Comparison of Choosers and Stayers : Prediction Rates

	correct	n	%age
Choosers	31	41	75.6
Stayers	43	55	78.2
No prediction		14	

Thus It may be observed that, In contrast to the Force Model, the present model was almost equally successful In predicting choosers and stayers - a significant point In Its favour. (Seven of the group could not be predicted.) It should also be noted that the Dissatisfaction Model covered 87% of the sample, compared to 49% for whom the Force Model could be applied.

Further Justification for the proposition of the Dissatisfaction Model as most useful In describing parental choice among this sample will be offered In Chapter 8. The remainder of this chapter offers a discussion of responses made by parents to the qualitative supplementary parts of question 10 of the questionnaire. This analysis was crucial In the formulation of a final model of choice In the next chapter.

### Introduction to Section 2

In this section a detailed analysis of all 87 valid replies to question 10 (3) will be offered. The question Itself was purely qualitative, viz:

*"Why would you like your child to attend this school rather than any of the others?"*

Many of the answers to this question were illuminating In that they directly questioned the relevance of an EV-based model to understanding the nature of parental choice. It became clear that parents' decision processes were rather more complex than may at first have been thought, and serious doubt was cast on the question of whether parents did or did not optimise. Firstly, however, the sub-sample will be described.

### The Sub-Sample

87 parents offered responses to question 10 split as follows : 46 stayers and 41 choosers responded. This represents a slight over-representation of choosers (+5%) and under-representation of stayers (-5%). Neither figure seems excessive. This was made up of 56 Ainslie Park parents and 31 from Broughton giving a 2% over-representation in favour of Broughton. Thus it can be seen that the sub-sample of respondents to this question was representative of the full sample.

The quality of responses was uniformly acceptable. Length of replies varied between two words and a substantial paragraph/list:

*"Reputation; academic standards; development of the individual; development of self confidence; fostering of self respect; commitment by head teacher and staff to high all round standards in academic, sport and æsthetic pursuits" (Sheriffyards))*

*n.b. In each case, the parents' chosen school will be given in brackets, thus (Solsgirth).*

Not surprisingly, the quality of responses varied with the desired choice of schools with the more "middle-class" schools provoking more full and literate responses. It would be wrong to suggest that the following responses were abbreviated by lack of intellect since it is clear that each constitutes a prime reason for choice in itself.

*"Got a good reputation" (Fleets)  
"Near to home" (Fleets)*

or

*"CATCHMENT AREA" (parent's emphasis) (Another E'burgh school)*

## Some Evidence

### a) Complexity

While it would be fair to say that EV theory is far from simple, it does tend to simplify the apparent decision process to a series of interconnected stages with little regard to the complexity of each stage as "process". Much agonising can precede (and follow) a decision, particularly one as centrally important as choice of school.

Clear evidence emerged that parents' perceptions could be rather more complex than could be addressed by a multiple choice format, viz :

*"My reasons are probably silly but I don't know much about how secondary schools function nowadays. When I was at school I had a lot of respect for my teachers and I always got on alright. Now the kids don't seem to have respect for themselves let alone their teachers and it's very sad. Solsglirth reminds me of my secondary school in that it's an old building, and maybe I expect the old ways have kept going, along with staff. p.s. Solsglirth was not my secondary school." (Solsglirth)*

This response is worth discussing more fully since it demonstrates clearly how a black box model can fail to account for a process. In essence the criterion as here portrayed is that the parent sought the sort of respect she had experienced at school and thus chose Solsglirth. The decision itself, however, was not based in any proven ability of Solsglirth to achieve this, but rather on the external appearance and subjective character of the buildings. Thus there was a discontinuity in the "black - box" representation:

*valued outcome (respect) → // → chosen school (Solsgirth)*

The following example illustrates that the nature of the process is not necessarily apparent from statements such as:

*"I strongly feel that Solsgirth has nothing to offer my child."  
(Fleets)*

Further analysis revealed the following observation:

*"I worked in Solsgirth and personally found that teachers don't  
take enough interest in the pupils..." (Fleets)*

and thus it would appear that the decision was based on searching for a school which was staffed by teachers who took enough interest. However, in response to being asked (elsewhere in the questionnaire) to rate her chosen school (Fleets) the parent stated:

*"I'm sorry but at the moment I don't have enough information  
about the above school [Fleets] to give a fair judgement"*

Thus the sub-optimal nature of the decision is exposed and it is fair to suggest that some form of satisficing occurred, with Solsgirth being avoided and Fleets the first acceptable choice on the chosen criterion, which in this case seemed to be *"must not be called Solsgirth"* since clearly the parent was not in possession of any information to allow a true optimal decision to be made.

Before leaving the subject of complexity, some parents' decisions were clearly attempts to optimise. However, an amount of extraneous detail may



mask the true reasons by virtue of the unusual nature of the comments :

*....because it is a more up to date reasonably modern school, where the pupils that I know that attend it are well behaved and actually spend time being taught unlike the schools in my area, where my little brother attends one and seems to spend most of his time going bus trips to Princes Street with their teacher doing her shopping" (Fleets)*

There were clearly two aspects to this decision. First there was avoidance of the catchment area school (Solsgirth) because of time wasting and behaviour, and secondly the attraction to the second school (Fleets) because of good reports by children at the school.

#### Individuality and Sub-optimisation

In previous chapters the subject of shared meaning was discussed. It was clear from parents' responses that views on the value of particular aspects of schools could be diametrically opposed yet remain valid justifications for choice. Witness these two contrasting views of the effects of school size :

*A child who has ability will be encouraged - however the average or below average child tends to be lost in the crowd" (Fleets)*

These, and other statements, make it clear that this parent considered that his child was academically gifted, and choice had been made to facilitate this. The parent also mentioned the following :

*The school has excellent facilities. There are plenty of clubs and teachers are always available when you want them." (Fleets)*

An alternative view of the "crowd" was given by another parent thus :

*Sheriffyards is closer to home but with the introduction of the Parents' Charter [it] is grossly overcrowded. It would appear that pupils are travelling from Fife to attend the [school]". (Fleets)*

It would be expected that such considerations would have been sufficient to deter the choice of this school. However, for the parent, the issue of discipline "trumped" the drawback and Sheriffyards was in fact chosen :

*"Sheriffyards would appear to apply some discipline in that uniforms must be worn. Fleets (the c.a. school) would appear to have a good/fair academic record but it lacks discipline and school uniforms." (Sheriffyards)*

Sheriffyards parents form an interesting case study in sub-optimisation.

Witness the following comments :

*"The school is one of the few that children still wear school uniform. The children that go there are a better standard than the local schools." (Sheriffyards)*

or

*"Children attending this school look like school children. Not so of the catchment area school where they are allowed to go as they please. Also children are better behaved coming and going to the school." (Sheriffyards)*

or

*"Good reputation. It has a wide syllabus. It would appear to meet all requirements." (Sheriffyards)*

However, the following comments raised doubts and should perhaps cause each of the above to be reassessed in the light of the comments :

*"Discipline seems better, better academic record - but it is*

*difficult to assess it properly since when I tried to get some information the school said I was too early." (Sheriffyards)*

In fact, of the seven parents opting to send their children to Sheriffyards, while maintaining variously that discipline/academic standards etc were better/best, none had had any previous or current contact with the school, either personally or through family connections. One parent did admit that his information had come from work colleagues. However the others made no mention of the sources.

It is difficult to accept any notion of optimisation based on no contact with schools and thus no tangible, rather than hearsay, evidence being available.

Levels of contact with schools emerged in the Second Study as a significant area of difference between choosers and stayers and this finding seems to be replicated here with 18 stayers mentioning personal or family contact among reasons for choice, but only 7 of the choosers. Once again it must be considered odd that the other 34 choosers were making a choice on the basis of little or no factual information. This is clearly a central feature in the political philosophy of parental choice, a topic returned to in Chapter 9.

#### A Macro Analysis

Counting heads in a qualitative study can be a forced and meaningless exercise, but it will become clear that much insight can be offered here.

The following represents a table of occasions on which a category of justification was mentioned by a parent. Thus there are many more than 87 reasons offered since each parent could offer more than one. Only the most "popular" have been included in the table (6 or more mentions).

**Table 7.14 : Reasons for Choice (1)**

Reason	no. of parents
Academic standards	42
Proximity	31
Siblings/Personal experience	24
Discipline related	20
Specific avoidance	14
Teacher/staff related	12
General reputation	9
Friends going	8
Child's happiness	7
Catchment area	6

Table 7.15 presents these reasons subdivided by choosers/stayers :

**Table 7.15 : Reasons for Choice (2) Choosers vs Stayers**

Reason	choosers	stayers
Academic standards	19	23
Proximity	4	27
Siblings/personal experience	6	18
Discipline	16	4
Specific avoidances	14	0
Teachers/staff related	8	4
General reputation	9	0
Friends going	0	8
Child's happiness	3	4
Catchment area	6	0

Thus it is clear that very significant differences can be determined between choosers and non choosers on a variety of reasons offered as

Justification for choice. This analysis can be extended if a breakdown of "academic standards" is made between those mentioning them only generally and those talking in terms of "better" and "best" i.e. comparatively, since it would be justifiable to assume that those making comparative judgements would be more strong in the tenure of their opinion, and following from this, more likely to have had the issue play a major part in their perceived decision process.

Table 7.16 : Breakdown of "Academic Standards"

	choosers	stayers
comparative	15	6
general	4	17
	-----	-----
	19	23

Clearly significant differences arose within the "academic standards" dimension, with choosers placing more store by them, with their insistence on "better" and "best" levels. Generally stayers seemed more content with "acceptable" levels. A rank ordering of reasons clearly demonstrates the differing concerns of the two sub groups of parents.

Table 7.17 : Rank Ordering of Reasons

Choosers	Stayers
1 Discipline (6)	1 Proximity (8)
2 Comparative acad. stands. (5)	2 Family experience (6)
3 Specific avoidances (9)	3 General acad. stands. (8)
4 General reputation (4)	4 Friends going (11)
5 Teachers/staff (6)	5 Comparative standards (2)
6= Catchment area (9)	6= Discipline (1)
6= Family experience (2)	6= Teachers/staff (5)
8= Proximity (1)	6= Child's happiness (10)
8= General acad. stands. (3)	9= Catchment area (6)
10 Child's happiness (6)	9= Specific avoidances (3)
11 Friends going (4)	9= General reputation (4)

*n.b. figures in parenthesis rank for comparative group*

There are thus demonstrable differences between choosers and non choosers in their reasons for choice of school. At first glance this seems surprising since responses to question 3 seemed to suggest that parents sought essentially the same things in schools. (From analysis of the data relating to question 3, it will be recalled that "proximity" was the only outcome on which there was a significant difference between the two groups.) This finding is substantiated here given the high percentage of parents mentioning proximity as a main factor, 22 parents placing it first on their list and, further, 8 of those offering it as sole substantive reason. (In fact, three of the four "proximity" reasons given by choosing parents related to the situation prevailing at Fleets Primary School, where the catchment area school, Fleets High School, was about two miles further away than the chosen school, Rigfoot).

Over half of these parents (15) were critical of Solsgirth/Fleets either in comments expressed elsewhere in the questionnaire or by the award of D/E grades (the scoring mechanism used to assign instrumentality in questions 7 and 8). This criticism had clearly been "trumped" by other concerns. The same follows for "friends going". For example :

*"Child prefers Solsgirth, probably because his friends are going there" (Solsgirth)*

and

*"...mainly because her friends will be going there. I would prefer Sheldmains..." (Solsgirth)*

A "negative trump" was offered by one parent who, although having no quarrel with Solsgirth, felt that his daughter would get on better elsewhere because of the previous (presumed mis-) deeds of elder children.

The concept of the trump seems ideal in explaining why parents can be at once dissatisfied with an option, yet still intend to make a request in favour of it. Essentially, a trump is a single powerful reason for choice which overrides other considerations which may be either weakly positive or negative.

Further analysis of table 7.17 clearly demonstrates the existence of two separate dimensions of choice for parents who were choosers and those who were not. Dealing first with choosers, the five most "popular" justifications given for choice were "discipline", "comparative academic standards" (as defined, "better" or "best"), "specific avoidances", "general reputation" and "teachers/staff". There is clearly a common thread to this list of justifications. Each of the "attracting" issues (that is all except specific avoidances) are broadly school centred. In contrast, three of the five most popular reasons given by staying parents, "proximity", "family experience" and "friends going" are more readily identified with the child rather than the school or education system.

These are generalisations but accord well with parallel findings by Elliot (Elliot et al, 81), Johnson and Ranson (Johnson and Ranson, 83) and Petch (Petch, 86) in making a distinction between what are variously called "process", "technological" and "social" factors. A better distinction seems to be to label the concerns of choosers "traditional" since they reflect views obviously cast in the traditional mould of popular thinking on Scottish education - that exams are central, qualifications essential and discipline paramount. The concerns of stayers represent a more "holistic" view. The child's overall development is central - school is close to the

home environment, siblings give close support, friends attend and while a good general standard of education is important, it is the happiness of the child which is paramount.

The traditional/holistic dichotomy was neatly evinced by the schools concerned. As represented by their brochures, Fleets and Sheriffyards were overtly traditional with an emphasis on examinations, rules and discipline. Holistic aspects were also highlighted, but in a secondary role. Solsgirth and Rigfoot, on the other hand, were both schools setting less emphasis on attainment and more on preparation for the sort of lifestyle pupils would face on leaving school - clearly very different from the academic futures expected of those of Fleets and Sheriffyards.

It seems therefore that parents chose different schools to fit their perceptions, values and even prejudices. This is wholly within the spirit of the legislation which clearly identified academic success as a primary criterion for the identification of "good" schools, and it appears from this sample that those choosing were doing so in a manner consistent with this view.



## CHAPTER 8

### Towards an Explanation of Parental Choice

#### Overview

Chapter 4 began with an exposition of the benefits of using a multiple strategies methodology to address the issue of parental choice. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 have presented the evidence from the implementation of this strategy. It is appropriate to begin this review chapter with a brief re-statement of the aims of this research.

#### Aims of the Research - A Restatement

The focus of the research was parental choice and the paradigm psychology. The goal was to find the best explanation of parental choice from among diverse psychological and decision theory models and not to merely use parental choice as the arena for a test of an expectancy type model. The aim of this research, as has often been stated was to explain and not simply to predict. Thus expectancy theory was considered a working paradigm. In Chapters 2 and 3 mention was made of the theoretical and methodological weaknesses of the theory and objections to its continuing use, for example by Simon (Simon, 1983). With these issues in mind it was important to spread the exploratory net fairly widely and not concentrate only on an examination of valences and instrumentalities. Thus both the Pilot and Second Studies focussed on parental choice from a

standpoint which, although incorporating strategic elements of the theory, nevertheless held a wide brief in terms of focus and information gathering. Both of these studies offered much by way of explanation in their own right and in preparation for the postal questionnaire-based Third Study. This study, while dealing with EV directly, nevertheless contained questions of a more general nature and, as noted in the previous chapter, provided a large amount of centrally relevant information.

### Opportunities for Triangulation

Parental choice proved to be a rich seam for researchers in the five years after the passing of the Education Act 1980. As well as the present research, a further four projects addressed the issues from a variety of methodological and philosophical standpoints. Before exploring the opportunities for the integration of all of these sources it seems useful to outline briefly the aims of each of the external studies.

#### a. Cambridge Accountability Project

This research was undertaken in 1979/80 by the Cambridge Institute of Education and funded by the SSRC (Elliot et al, 1981). While their prime interest was in accountability per se, a small project on parental choice was undertaken involving 32 parents in a single school by Elliot. While methodologically the study can be criticised for its narrowness and the self-selected nature of the sample, it nevertheless offers some insight into issues central to parents in an English middle class environment. Elliot's

conceptualisation of process and product criteria has been central to much further work in the field.

#### b.Edinburgh Project

This research was undertaken in 1983-85 by the University of Edinburgh Department of Social Administration (now Department of Social Policy) and funded by the SSRC (ESRC). Aspects of the germination of parental choice and the process of its implementation formed one aspect of the research, while another focussed on the procedural implications of both requests and appeals for local authorities. However, in this context, the prime area of interest was a large study of parents' choices in three Scottish local authorities. This was accomplished using a wide ranging interview schedule for parents of both primary 1 and secondary 1 entry children.

#### c.Glasgow Project

This research was undertaken by the University of Glasgow Department of Education and was funded by the SED (University of Glasgow, 1986). It is best to view this research as complementary to the Edinburgh Project, if having less emphasis on legal and procedural issues and more on the assessment of educational and administrative effects at the level of individual schools, and being primarily concerned with secondary entry. Otherwise its methodology differed little from the Edinburgh project.

#### d.NFER

This research was undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research. Its focus was the interaction between parents and LEAs, in terms of rights, information provision, choice behaviour and appeals administration. The project gathered information from 2740 parents over four local authority areas, all in England.

While two of the above were English based, each nevertheless has something to contribute to the findings of the present research. Shipman (1981) observed that post-hoc validation of data by comparison with other pieces of research (labelled "external triangulation" in Chapter 4) was a useful and valid research technique. In the present circumstances of such a rich seam so intensively mined it seems highly appropriate to pursue such a method here.

The chapter will follow in two parts. The first will offer a review of the internal evidence for and against the provisional model offered in Chapter 3. An evaluation of the model will be offered. The second part of the chapter will move towards a new model of parental choice calling on the wealth of both internal and external data.

#### The Provisional Model : A Review of the Evidence

It will be recalled that the provisional model contained several linked aspects, thresholds, dissatisfaction and the force model itself. The following sections will review the evidence derived from all three studies

for each of the aspects in turn prior to offering an overall evaluation of the worth of using Expectancy Theory in this area of social policy.

#### The Thresholds - An Evaluation

The concept of the threshold which derived directly from Kerr, has its antecedents rather earlier with Cyert and March (1963) and Burton (1966) and it is to their thinking that the concept of the threshold as demonstrated by parental choice owes most. Kerr (1982) perceived that many pensioners would not be in a position to make any application for supplementary benefit since, for them, the decision would not be at all salient. Thus, for some, life events may have precluded applying, for others lack of knowledge and comprehension of the system. Following this reasoning, it was to be expected that many incorrect predictions would be obtained by an EV type of formulation due to the presence in the analysis of large numbers of people for whom the issue would not be salient. Thus Kerr chose to assess their level of salience via its component parts before "allowing" them to proceed to the choice phase. The two stage model proved to be very successful.

Such an approach seemed compelling for the area of parental choice as well. Clearly the decision whether to make a placing request would be differentially relevant even across the range of eligible parents, namely those in the Pilot and Second studies whose children were in Primary 7 and in Primary 6 for the Third Study. The reasons perceived at the outset to be likely to account for such "failure" to proceed to a choice stage were to a certain extent intuitive but also adapted from Kerr's work. Briefly, these

were salience, responsibility, stability and dissatisfaction. It would serve little purpose to restate them in detail here and thus reference should be made to Chapter 3.

#### a. Salience

While there is little doubt that the Solsgirth area offered a special set of circumstances in terms of the planned and then postponed closure of the school (see Chapter 4 above), there is ample evidence to suggest that the issue was salient more generally, for example, the continuously rising numbers of placing requests cited in Chapter 1. Both Edinburgh and Glasgow projects interviewed in excess of 1000 parents (NFER some 2740 parents). The latter achieved an eventual response rate (after multiple reminders) of around 65% of their widely targetted sample. While, of course, each research team chose areas likely to be of interest, these factors seem to indicate that Solsgirth was not unusual in having such a high incidence of salience.

In one sense, all of the foregoing is somewhat artificial since the salience of the issue cannot be inferred for those who declined to take part in each of the studies. Jones and McPherson (1972) claim that non-response may be related to low IQ and early school leaving. The Glasgow researchers use this firstly as an explanation of differential response rates, and, moreover, they suggest that "low socio-economic families" were proportionately over represented among the non-choosers. Given the homogeneous nature of the present study area, it is difficult to support this conclusion. This issue can be widened to encompass, in effect,

barriers to participation. In preparation for the Pilot and Second Studies each of the Headteachers concerned (six in all) was given the opportunity to assess the language and approach of the questionnaires in order to gauge whether their parent groups would be in a position both to comprehend, and comply with, the terms of the requests made to them. In some cases minor revisions were made to facilitate this. Each felt, however, that an overwhelming number of the parents would be in a position to reply if they so chose.

Clearly it would be overly simplistic to suggest that those for whom the issue was not salient were those who either did not consent to be interviewed or did not return the questionnaire, since placing request statistics indicate that the number of requests made in each case outnumbered the sizes of the "choosing" parents sampled.

Levels of salience of the primary issue of the right to make a choice of school for their child among those participating in the research were demonstrably high. (See for example Table 7.4 for evidence from the Third Study.)

*"Parents generally knew of their right to make a placing request. Obviously those who made placing requests knew of their right, but so did 86% of parents responding to our questionnaire who did not make a placing request." (University of Glasgow, 1986)*

The evidence from the present study would not contradict this statement. As noted above, the proportion of parents knowing, in very general terms at least, of their right to choose a school was effectively 100% for each of the study areas.

The allied issue of information about the Education (Scotland) Act 1981 did, however, produce a more varied response. While only two of the almost 200 parents who were either interviewed or returned questionnaires claimed no direct knowledge of the existence of the Act itself, it was clear that many more had only a rudimentary knowledge of its provisions. In fact, this lack of detailed information was common to both choosers and non-choosers. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that any parent was prevented from making a request by lack of either general or detailed information. This is supported by evidence from the Pilot and Second Studies in which all parents stated that they would approach one of a range of agents of the school system should more detailed knowledge of any issue be required.

Since the operation of a threshold requires that a number of respondents should fail to attain the required level, at best therefore, the value of salience (or information) as a threshold per se cannot be demonstrated. Nevertheless, in so far as it remains a *sine qua non* of choice, it is a useful part of the explanation of the process of choice.

#### b. Responsibility

The ultimate demonstration of locus of responsibility remains the adversarial setting of the Sheriff Court through an appeal against the refusal of a request. Two of the parents in the present research, one in the Second and one in the Third, had carried through appeals against the system of exceptional admissions to the highest level the parents perceived to be available to them, the Education Committee of the Regional Council. In both cases the parents won their cases. In the years of the research, only



a very small percentage of requests was refused (SED, 1985). Thus, for example, in Strathclyde in 1982 thirteen requests (for the same school) were refused at S1 (out of over 600 made) and in Lothian in 1983/4 none at all were refused at S1.

The University of Glasgow study reports blandly that "both parents and headteachers generally support the principle of parental choice of school". Evidence from the present study could equally blandly confirm this. However, it should be noted that very few parents saw their right as in any way crucial. Most agreed that *in general* choice was a good thing but few offered any evidence or observation to support this contention. A small number reported instances of past or potential personal hardship, but this was a small minority (and of these, none had ultimately failed to receive satisfaction from the system then operating). Thus parents would appear to be viewing parental choice as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself. Several parents interviewed for the Second Study noted that it was not in fact parental choice itself which was important but the perception that it was a way in which schools could be made to listen and become responsive to their views and needs. This may be somewhat idealistic since the University of Glasgow researchers note no evidence of curricular change as a consequence of choice, nor of any increase in accountability of schools. Adler and Bondi (1988) suggest that it is in response to the issue of falling school rolls and resultant re-zoning, rather than parental choice per se, that educational authorities and schools on one hand, and parents on the other have been forced to become more aware of each others views and positions.

The specific evidence of the present research is generally conclusive. While the overwhelming majority of parents saw choice of school as rightly their decision, the exceptions are worth noting. Only one parent, a Marxist, graduate and part-time teacher of psychology, felt that the decision was solely one for the education authority to make. One parent, a bank clerk, stated that the decision was wholly that of her son. Her view was that, if the child's reasons were acceptable, she would accede to his wishes whatever her personal views - witnessed by the fact that the child would attend a school other than the one his mother would have otherwise have chosen. The most interesting comparison - what would their view have been in, say, 1974 rather than 1984 when "parental choice" as such had not existed - must of course remain unexplored. However, evidence cited in Chapter 1 suggests that no popular movement for choice had arisen in absence of legislation.

In summary, therefore, there is no evidence of any parent being prevented from making a placing request as a consequence of a perception that the decision was not properly theirs to make. More interestingly, there is little evidence to suggest that, to paraphrase Voltaire, had a right not existed, it would have been necessary to invent one.

### c. Stability

The particular circumstances of the participants in Kerr's study made the notion of stability instinctively compelling. Faced with senility, bereavement and so on, it is not surprising that a proportion of pensioners should have found the application for a supplementary pension a non-salient

issue. Despite a lack of evidence to illustrate people for whom "stability" has proved to be a barrier, the notion remains compelling. It is perhaps too easy to suggest that some of the parents who did not respond to the questionnaire were likely to be in such circumstances, but, in discussions with headteachers (see above), each made observations about parents who would be unlikely to return questionnaires because of particular social or domestic circumstances. This leads to the suggestion (which by definition cannot in this case be supported by direct evidence) that parents whose situations are not stable find the wider issues of education per se non salient. Further anecdotal evidence was provided in these conversations by observations that those parents who were unlikely to return questionnaires were also those who failed to attend parents nights, acknowledge communications and only came to the school in response to trouble of some sort. If this is the case, then it was always unlikely that parents in non-stable situations would return questionnaires at all.

The University of Glasgow study found some evidence that parents moving house often made requests to allow their children to continue at the previous catchment area school. While no actual requests of this sort were found in the present study, two parents who indicated a likelihood of moving house nevertheless stated that they would want their children to remain at Solsgirth.

#### Review of the Thresholds

Modern computer technology allows several series of calculations or tasks to be carried out at the same time. This can be viewed as a series of

layers where each represents a single task. Multi-tasking cannot be performed by a computer which is not specifically programmed to do so. To accomplish this an operating system must be installed to control the progress and scheduling of the processing (simplistically, this is done by carrying out a part of each task - a layer - in sequence with the others). The operating system remains in the background. While there is little visible evidence of its operation, it remains central to the understanding of how the computer successfully manages and achieves its set series of tasks. In some ways this is a useful way of conceptualising the role of the thresholds of salience, responsibility and stability. They are essential background aspects of parental choice which must be present before decisions can be made. Finding evidence of them is rather like, to continue the above analogy, searching for an operating system by examining computers which have failed. It was always unlikely that many parents would be prevented from being in a position of making a choice by any of these proposed thresholds. (Dissatisfaction is somewhat different and will be discussed below.) This does not, in itself, invalidate the notion of thresholds. What it rather does is force a change in the way in which they are perceived. In terms of viewing the choice decision, it may be better to regard them as background factors essential to the decision whether or not to make a placing request. The substantial difference is that this implies explanation not exclusion.

The present research identified only one specific barrier to choice - the issue of free school bus passes. Stillman and Maychell (1986) offer some support for this in noting that 11% of those who said they had "no choice" did so because of transport service or cost. (This represented 65 parents.)

The political implications of this issue call into question a fundamental plank of the philosophy of choice as espoused by the Conservative government. This issue will be further developed in Chapter 9.

### Information Gathering

*"Most parents had at least looked at the school handbook."  
(University of Glasgow, 1986)*

While such a statement may have been true, the University of Glasgow team went on to note that far fewer parents actually remembered anything that they had read, and most of that which they did remember was in terms of school day, uniforms and other sundry regulations. In some contrast, Cox, Balchin and Marks (1989) in a book entitled "Choosing a State School" list no fewer than 17 aspects of a brochure which they consider vital to properly assess the fitness or otherwise of a school. The present research found only one parent who had made any part of a choice decision as a consequence of reading a school brochure. This is a microcosm of the gulf between accepted wisdom and found practice in terms of the usage and abuse of information.

### Usage and Abuse

Ryan and Cross (1943) and Coleman, Katz and Menzel (1966) suggest that there are two sorts of sources of information, those which merely inform and those which legitimate. An example (from the latter) would be that doctors gain information on new proprietary brands from advertising and representatives yet would not consider adopting the product without the endorsement of one they consider a "significant other". In this case the

"other" might be a respected colleague, a professional association or journal. Although Ryan and Cross studied farmers, their findings were broadly similar. As outlined in Chapter 3, it is possible to infer a similar sort of structure for parents' information about schools. A possible scenario would run thus : a parent receives information from many sources including friends, relatives, newspapers or even TV; this information is assimilated and compared to facts gained from schools and their brochures, from visits, or even from statements by teachers; only then is the information legitimised and action considered. How far does this scenario appear true in the light of the evidence gathered in the present research ?

Certainly there are people for whom this scenario may approach an explanation of the process. However, for a large majority of those interviewed, reality was somewhat different. In the Pilot Study a set of special circumstances obtained in terms of the relationship between parents at one of the study schools and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. It was clear that a number of Catholic parents viewed the church and the perceived agent of the church, the primary school Headteacher, as the "significant other", and thus considered only Catholic schools. It is perfectly likely that had the church dictated a third school, they would have sent their children there.

There is in fact a subtle distinction between this case and those envisaged by Coleman, Katz and Menzel (1966). The latter perceived legitimising authority to be based in professionalism and ethics and by extrapolation, earned respect. The Greenock parents' legitimising authority was by virtue of unquestioning obedience to religious faith. Nevertheless, in this case,

the church is a legitimising authority in strict terms.

*"Headteachers and teachers tend not to advise parents about which schools to choose, but when they do so their advice carries weight." (University of Glasgow, 1986)*

Two parents interviewed for the Second Study claimed that their child's primary school teacher had advised them regarding choice of school. In neither case is there any inference of special needs on the part of the child. Similarly, a further four parents claimed to have friends who worked as teachers who had recommended for or against individual schools.

*"There is a problem of professional ethics to be resolved about the issues over which teachers and headteachers should advise parents. In any advice which they did give, headteachers were reluctant to criticise other schools." (Op cit)*

Clearly teachers in the present study area had no such reservations. In the terms of Coleman, Katz and Menzel (op cit), teachers are a legitimising authority. Whether they should be allowed to fill this role is a matter for debate.

In another case, from the Second Study, one parent interviewed had sought information from a number of sources prior to making a free choice among a number of schools, teachers' opinions, brochures and visits, but this was unusual. A parent in the Third Study who had moved from England asked among colleagues which school would be best for his child. As there is no reason to suspect that these colleagues were teachers or education specialists, this example neatly illustrates the nature of legitimising authority among parents.



## Parent Power

*"Friends and neighbours were an important source of information for placing and non placing request samples ..... parents who were interviewed generally said that they found out more about schools through informal channels than from official sources ..... those who had no first hand experience of a school either through attending it or working at it tended to rely on the opinions of friends and neighbours " (University of Glasgow, 1986)*

There is no doubt that for parents the most common legitimising authority was other parents and their children. In both Pilot and Second Studies an overwhelming number spontaneously gave other parents' opinions as "very important". Almost inevitably this view was modified when describing the decision process, specifically to play down the role of others. Why they should have done so may be a function of their need to prove to themselves, via the interviewer, that their decision had been (a) optimum and rational, and (b) their own. The evidence of the present studies, and that of the University of Glasgow (University of Glasgow, 1986) and Stillman and Maychell (Stillman and Maychell, 1986) strongly suggests that the initial comments are a more accurate reflection of the process.

It is easy to understand why school reputations are such virulent dictators of a school's success or failure in the parental choice market place given the nature of the legitimising authority. Among parents, facts are apparently coincidental and subjectivity thus rife. Public opinion is undoubtedly more ready to wane than wax. However, perhaps the most crucial aspect of this reliance on parental information lies in the converse lack of contact, and by definition, interest, and trust in school-produced information, be it either written or through visits. None of the parents



Interviewed in either Pilot or Second Studies had visited the school of their choice prior to making that choice for the purposes of gathering information. The Glasgow project noted some evidence of such behaviour but although suggesting that most parents visited prior to their children starting, offered no indication that this was prior to choice (University of Glasgow, 1986).

In fact all three external and the first two studies under discussion here noted that parents made up their minds well in advance of being asked, and often more than a year in advance. Relevant factual information could not therefore be available to these parents. Each of the parents in the Second Study had, by the time of the interview, made up their minds on choice of school. Only two had read brochures, none specifically visited the schools concerned. In the Third Study, a parent had approached a school for information, was refused on grounds of unavailability, yet was still certain that this would be the ultimate choice. The University of Glasgow team, who asked parents specifically about the impact of brochures on their decisions found that, in fact, they had had little if any, few parents even bothering to request those for alternative or chosen schools.

Clearly therefore, purely factual information seems to play only a small part in the information gathering of parents. Strong support for this hypothesis is given by Adler, Petch and Tweedie (Adler, Petch and Tweedie, 1986) :

*"On the other hand, there was only occasional reference to the subjects on offer at the school or to the school's educational record in terms of published examination results."*

It would appear that brochures are largely redundant, except, of course, in providing post-hoc justifications for choices made. Thus exam statistics would only be consulted to "prove" X was a good school and so on, after the event.

These findings fit rather uneasily with the notion expressed by Sir Keith Joseph (Glasgow Herald 8/10/80 - speech at Conservative Party Conference) that parents' decisions would be "informed" and of sufficient quality to guide policy making.

In a sense parents can be considered to be simplifying their "assumptive worlds". It is highly unlikely that parents would have the skills or patience to evaluate all the information which would be available to them. When it is observed that one Edinburgh school brochure (1983) was 100 pages long, it is easy to draw an analogy with offers for sale of shares by companies. During the lead up to the privatisation of, for example, British Petroleum, potential investors had many documents made available to them on the performance of the company past, present and future, and from the government on the merits of privatisation. How much of this information was actually consumed? It is likely that the answer was "enough" - enough to provide the self-justification for the pre-decided course of action, that was to buy shares. People had simplified their assumptive worlds, they had taken in only enough information, the extent to which enough was enough varying across potential investors. It is easy to carry forward the privatisation analogy. In a sense the brochures released by schools are offers for sale, the product being the educational experience to be had from the school. Parents' minds are made up in advance and they simplify

their assumptive worlds by taking in only "enough" information to self-justify their decisions. This process is rather akin to consulting "Which" after buying an item and only reading the complimentary passages.

The implications of information usage for the experimental model will be discussed below, and the political implications in Chapter 9. It is, however, clear that the present research calls into question the most fundamental tenet underlying both EV and the political philosophy of choice - that parents are in a position to make rational and informed judgements about and between schools.

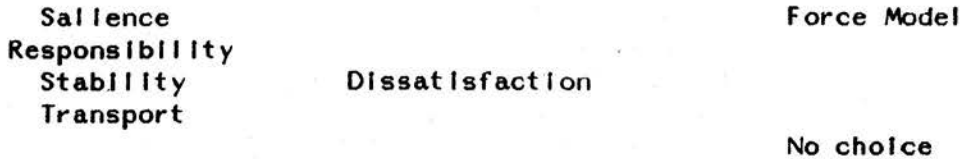
#### The Force Model

The evidence for the operation of a force model of parental choice was thoroughly reviewed in Chapter 7. In terms of the model itself, neither the Pilot or Second Studies, nor any of the external studies, could offer much cross validation. None of the external studies set out to offer a predictive model of parental choice using a specific theoretical standpoint. However, as will be seen below, the body of evidence offered must cast considerable doubt on the usefulness of the predictive model.

To summarise briefly, the force model was shown to predict successfully in 69% of cases, but it failed to account for the choices of almost half the sample who did not choose to rate a second school. In fact, this apparent drawback can be integrated with the predictive model to produce an enhanced formulation.

### An Integrated Model

It is first necessary to clarify an assumption about the motives of those failing to rate a second school on the questionnaire. While it may be indicative of a lack of interest or comprehension, it seems most likely that the best indication of motive is that such parents are not sufficiently dissatisfied with the catchment area school to consider a second school. This is, in essence, a threshold of dissatisfaction. In the present research, 53 parents failed to attain it. 57 parents were, however, sufficiently dissatisfied to rate a second school. Among these parents it was appropriate to use a force model of choice. The integrated model can be summarised thus :



Using the model above, the sample could be extended to include 107 parents rather than the 57 previously included. Fifty three were deemed to have been insufficiently dissatisfied. Of those who were, and thus whose choices were eligible for inclusion in the force model, 34 were correctly predicted, 17 incorrectly and three had scores which did not allow a prediction to be made. Thus, using this model, almost 90% of the sample was correctly "predicted" using the integrated model. While this is, in itself, impressive, it would be wrong nevertheless to judge the full worth of a model on a single facet alone. It is also necessary to try to assess what the model actually implies in terms of explaining the choice decision.

There are two possible weaknesses in this formulation of parental choice. While it is likely that the goal of 100% prediction would remain unattainable, it is nevertheless interesting to assess the underlying causes of misprediction. It will be recalled that the above formulation excluded those parents whose lack of dissatisfaction could be inferred. Of those who were deemed to be "dissatisfied", the correct predictions represented those who felt that the instrumentality of a second school was higher than that of the catchment area school. The incorrect predictions represented those who, while apparently dissatisfied, nevertheless felt that, on one hand, while the instrumentality of the second school was higher, their choice should be the catchment area school, and on the other, that although not apparently dissatisfied, their choice should be elsewhere.

It is possible to account for the first group by reference to the definition of thresholds, and specifically that a sufficient level of dissatisfaction needs to be present before a choice will be likely to occur. Building this issue into a mathematical model is complex. While it is easy to reassign the critical value of dissatisfaction to a value of other than zero, this raises a number of questions. Such an analysis was conducted on the data from the Third Study. Progressively, various values of gross dissatisfaction (as derived by the  $\Sigma(I-V)$  transformation) were used as trigger points in order to "improve" predication rates. In fact, the net result was not to significantly increase rates at all. Certainly, at some values, a higher rate was achieved than at others, but, importantly the effect was not continuous in the direction either of increasing satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The pattern of increased prediction rates was spread over both positive and negative values of satisfaction.

Similarly, while it may have been expected that the reasons for misprediction would polarise, this did not in fact happen until the set level of dissatisfaction was significantly above or below zero. Thus in a band width of 17 raw score points around zero, representing almost one point on the original scale, the levels of dissatisfaction alone were not useful predictors of choice.

The implication of this finding is clear. While parents may decide to consider a second school because of dissatisfaction with a catchment area school, the level at which this is triggered is individualistic. This is an intuitive finding, but one which has some implications for the use of a mathematical model. Clearly, if the point at which dissatisfaction triggers action is particular to the individual, as the evidence above proves, then using any sort of a *priori* construct in the formulation to represent this trigger level is almost by definition likely to be only partially effective. In terms of modelling, this is not a particularly major drawback since, with any model, there must be a band width of error variance of greater or lesser size. The essence of successful modelling is to set such a trigger point so that band widths are minimised. In this case, the intuitive trigger point, a score of zero, was not markedly poorer than any artificially derived level (2% poorer than the "best" level). While it would be easy to use such an artificial level because it predicts "best", it makes little sense in terms of explanation. (This would be akin to planning a house with 2.4 single bedrooms on the basis that the average family has 2.4 children.)

More significant is the question posed by parents' information bases. The review earlier in this chapter suggested strongly that parents' decisions

are based on little factual information, elements of hearsay and, on occasion, simple prejudice. In one sense this makes little difference to the expectancy valence formulation since the model does not make any assessment of the quality of the information. What it suggests is that parents would maximise on the assessment of outcomes they valued highly. Similarly, since the formulation is within - persons, it does not matter that decisions are individualistic.

These assumptions contain the elements which make expectancy valence an inappropriate tool for the investigation of parental choice. The first is that the model assumes that parents make decisions which are optimal. None of the data from this research indicated that this was the case. It did so on two fronts. Firstly, there is no indication that any parent went through a process which could lead to an optimal decision. For example, no parent in the Pilot or Second Studies, and only one in the Third made any attempt to request brochures relating to alternative schools, even those to which they intended to send their children. Similarly, despite the partially contradictory evidence of the Glasgow Study, no parent made a visit to any intended school.

The second issue is information itself. While Edwardes' (Edwardes, 1954) concept of "economic man" is unreasonable in demanding perfect knowledge, it is incomprehensible that any maximisation or optimisation could take place in an information vacuum. Parents simply do not have the information required. In many cases, however, parents claimed they did have the information. In a sense, any parent who rated schools, by definition, claimed to have information sufficient to allow them to make such an

estimation. This assumption is simply untenable in the light of the findings of the present research.

The implications of these findings for the use of an Expectancy Valence model to address parental choice are highly damaging. There is no doubt that the model was successful in predicting the choices of a large number of parents, particularly when recast into the Integrated model presented earlier in this chapter. It would have been more surprising had it not predicted successfully. As Klein (Klein, 1983) states, EV seems to have the power to predict even when many of its axioms are clearly violated - as they are in this case. Klein notes that it is usually possible to alter certain of the parameters to ensure that whatever circumstances prevent the highest rate of prediction being obtained are minimised. The present research has done exactly this in using the threshold of dissatisfaction to partial out those for whom the decision does not take place. Kerr (1982) similarly used thresholds to accomplish the same end. Herriot and Ecob (1979) used only demonstrably salient outcomes in predictive choice decisions. Klein further cites the instance of using time as a "scarce resource" to describe why information searches often stop some way short of an optimal level. It would be possible to advance such a theory in this case. In terms of accounting for a shortcoming of the model it is intuitively compelling. However, all of the evidence points also to the fact that it would be untrue. Parents have no interest in information accumulation. Parents have no interest in rational maximisation.



Adler and Patch (1986) offer some support for this in concluding that:

*"[Parents] have, in many cases, been concerned to avoid their district school and have opted for a more satisfactory alternative. In doing so, they have been influenced more by the general reputation of the schools than by any careful assessment of the education they provide. Thus, there is a good deal of evidence for incremental problem solving but considerably less for rational choice."*

It seems clear that the use of EV in this type of decision is seriously undermined. Simon (1972 and 1983 inter alia) has observed that while utility based theory is a very useful predictive tool in certain circumstances, its use is rarely justified separately in terms of its appropriateness to the constructs it seeks to measure. Simon (1983) observes that utility theories finesse the origins of the subjective perceptions they assess. It is clear in this case that to do so would, while removing a potential source of logical difficulty, nevertheless entail ignoring a fundamental objection to the model. As proposed, the model does not equate in any way to the process of decision making, it adds little to understanding why parents make the decisions they do and tries to impose on the decisions a structure of unjustified complexity. Simon further notes that the "real world" is often vastly different from that understood by EV. There is no doubt that parents live in the real world.

This research adds to the criticisms of Simon in offering a clear case where the EV model predicts successfully but is nevertheless demonstrably flawed. To use a computer analogy, the model has neatly proved that, however processed, garbage in = garbage out.

### Why do Parents Choose Schools ?

There is a substantial body of evidence available from which to make an assessment of why parents choose, in the first instance, whether to make a choice, and, in the second, what that choice would be.

The evidence from the present research is quite clear. In the first instance it seems essential that parents are in some way dissatisfied with their assigned school. The causes of this dissatisfaction need not be based in any factual evidence, nor need they have been shaped into concrete "reasons". Parents can be dissatisfied through a general unease with unspecified aspects of the school. Petch (1986) in summarising reasons for rejection of schools found that the three most common were "child would be unhappy", "child did not want to go" and "poor discipline". The first two of these are certainly vague in the sense that they prompt the subsidiary question "why". There is little evidence from the three internal studies that thought through answers could be given. Similarly, the Glasgow Study found the main causes of avoidance to be "bad reputation" and "inconvenient location". The evidence from both Pilot and Second Studies reflect these findings. Among parents in Greenock, the prevalent reasons for rejection were discipline and bad reputation, and among those in Edinburgh, poor academic record and, once again, discipline.

The comments on parents' information gathering offered in the early part of this chapter point to the fact that such reasons are unlikely to be founded in tangible evidence, rather in hearsay and past prejudice. The Glasgow Study cited evidence, particularly from headteachers, although also

from parents that social prejudice constituted the main reason for rejection of some schools.

Following from dissatisfaction, the decision itself may be supposed to conform to a market model of choice of competing alternatives. While the present research found little evidence for this conceptualisation, it is accepted that a little more was found by the Edinburgh study. Petch (op cit) found that as few as 30% of parents choosing schools in areas where viable choice existed considered more than one school. (The Glasgow research did not address this issue systematically.) Stillman and Maychell (1986) perhaps offer the key to this issue. In two of their study areas which could be categorised as working class, they found less than 10% of parents who had considered more than one school. However, in a prosperous burgh, they found around 30% had considered more than one. It seems likely, therefore, that the levels of consideration of alternatives found in the present research are, to some extent, reflective of the nature of the area, and that care should be taken in strict generalisation. Nevertheless, even 30% as a maximum considering other schools is a very small percentage, and, in the light of this, it does seem unlikely that the market model of parental choice can be tenable.

Parents' reasons for choice of school are remarkably consistent across both internal and external studies. While the experimental model of the present research chose to focus on specific factors, there was some evidence that other courses may have been equally justified. Petch's analysis of reasons for choice (rather than avoidance) concluded that non-specific justifications were most prevalent. Thus the top 3 offered were

"child would be happier", "child prefers" and "better discipline" (Petch, 1986). Similarly, Stillman and Maychell found general academic standards, better discipline and proximity to be most important (Stillman and Maychell, 1986). The Glasgow Study found a prevalence of general, if vague, justifications of "standards" and location (University of Glasgow, 1986).

The Glasgow Study found only 10% of parents offered specific curricular reasons for choice. Petch, perhaps optimistically, suggests that "child will be more happy" may be somehow shorthand for a "*complex of factors which include assessment of the various details of the educational provision.*" It would be a surprise if parents were in a position to offer such specific justifications given the strictures noted in terms of information sought and held. Elsewhere, however, Adler and Petch (1986) note:

*Our general conclusion is that the majority of parents have in mind a broad general agenda in selecting a secondary school for their child and are as much, if not more concerned with social considerations than academic issues.*

The present research confirms most of these accounts of why parents say they choose schools. The Pilot Study found parents seeking better discipline and a better academic record. This was clearly a tenable view in the light of the existence of two high status schools, one Catholic and one non-denominational within the study area. None of the parents admitted choosing for social reasons. This was despite their reasons for avoidance being couched in terms of social issues of discipline and "class" of pupil. The Second Study further reflected parents seeking better discipline and academic standards, although again no specific evidence was found to suggest that any assessment of the likelihood of finding them at the

chosen school had take place. The evidence from the Third Study similarly suggested that parents chose in terms of discipline and academic standards, their prime reasons for avoidance.

The Glasgow Study claimed that the decisions of choosers were more considered than those of stayers because of a higher incidence of comparative and superlative comments. The Third Study does confirm that choosers and stayers do vary in these terms. Why this should be seems more tied up with the fact that parents who are generally satisfied, and thus not intending to make a choice, have no need to, nor likelihood of making such comparisons. Whether, in fact, such comparisons are made is questionable, since little evidence emerged from any of the studies to suggest that most parents made any comparison at all among schools.

The balance between push and pull varied across study areas. Thus in Greenock there was evidence of parents choosing because of unspecified attractions of alternative schools. In the Second and Third Study areas the issue was more complex. While there were some parents whose decisions were based in a "pull" series of justifications - for example the two parents in the Second Study opting for Sheriffyards, - for many others it seemed that it was the "push", the avoidance of Solsgirth, which provide the motivation.

This dichotomy was also noted by the three external studies to a greater or lesser extent. Each found evidence of parents avoiding what they saw as "bad schools" rather than being attracted to "good schools". Adler and Petch (op cit) found considerable evidence of avoidance behaviour, although

In varying degrees across their study areas. Similarly, the Glasgow Study observed considerable avoidance behaviour although they did not seem to regard this evidence as particularly significant when concluding why parents had made the choices they had. Similarly, Stillman and Maychell (op cit) make far more of positive statement in apparent contradiction of the large body of evidence suggesting avoidance.

The latter two studies seem to fail to treat the decision as a process rather than a discrete series of events. Even although for some parents, the prime reason for choice is obviously the avoidance of the catchment area school, it is still likely that positive statements about the chosen school will be made, if only to facilitate self-justification. It would be wrong to regard these "reasons" as explanations of choice.

The present research in isolation offers a clear model of why parents make a placing request. Initially, parents must feel some dissatisfaction with the catchment area school. It is likely that, in the absence of such dissatisfaction no placing request will be considered. If it is present it is likely that parents will choose the first alternative perceived to be satisfactory. It is not likely that alternative schools will be considered unless the first considered is unsuitable. Essentially, parents satisfice. Support for this hypothesis is provided by Adler and Petch (1986) who conclude that :

*"for most requesters, choice involves a process of 'satisficing' in which rejection of an unsatisfactory district (catchment area) school is followed by the selection of a satisfactory alternative."*

### Some Limitations of the Research

It must be accepted that the external studies found more, although still relatively little, evidence for the operation of the sort of free market model of parental choice implied by both the philosophy and political implications of the legislation. Similarly, the restricted social composition of the present samples made it likely that progression to higher status schools would be more in evidence than in other areas. However, this finding is not particular to the present study areas alone. Indeed, the Glasgow research came to broadly the same conclusion across a wider spectrum where a pecking order of low - medium - high status schools emerged.

There must remain a lingering doubt over two issues germane to the research. The first is the compromise outlined in Chapter 2 between the needs of academic rigour and the limitations imposed by the funding authority. While a satisfactory model of choice has been derived, it would be unwise to assert that it is the *best* model available. Clearly the dismissal of expectancy theory as a suitable explanation is a productive outcome in itself, it nevertheless illustrates that had not so much of the effort been required to be diverted into its exploration, other avenues could have been explored with positive rather than negative benefit. This said, it would be equally unwise to make too much of this since, as noted above, the model which was derived is at the very least *satisfactory*.

The second issue relates to the generalisability of the research. It must be accepted that the practical constraints of postgraduate research

dictate that only a limited sample can be approached. In this respect, the final figure of some 200 respondents seems satisfactory. Nevertheless, allusion was made earlier in this section to the limited social and geographic range of the various samples. Undoubtedly, other researchers found different issues to be salient to the various groups with which they interacted. The use of different is deliberate. The issues are not, on the widest level, more or less important. What the present research has successfully illustrated is that parents choose for a wide variety of reasons - different reasons will occur more frequently in some areas rather than others. The large advantage enjoyed by the other studies is their coverage of a far wider range of class and geographic area and thus it is far more likely that they will have encountered more of the total set of issues. By extension therefore, it is safer to generalise from their research. This said, while it must be accepted that the generalisability of the present research is limited, caution must be exercised in the extent to which individual decisions are ascribed to reasons derived from aggregated observation - parental choice is individualistic.

Despite these caveats, the internal studies offer a model of choice which is congruent and consistent with those offered by the external studies. For almost all of the findings, there is a measure of validation provided by the other research. In the absence of this, the entire basis of the research would have had to be called into question. In the event, its existence offers reassurance that the present model has much to offer the study of parental choice.



The following chapter will examine the implications of these findings for the political philosophy of parental choice. Its conclusions are highly critical of the theoretical foundation of parental choice. In differing ways, and to a different extent, so too are those of Adler, Petch and Tweedie, and Stillman and Maychell. Those of the University of Glasgow stand apart in largely sanitising the problems in pursuit of what appears to be a pre-held belief that parental choice is a good thing. In the present political climate, it is highly unlikely that any of the research findings from whatever source will impact on policy formulation. As was outlined in Chapter 1 and will be further discussed in Chapter 9, the policy has been driven by overt ideological considerations and thus it is unlikely that evidence of its shortcomings will be incorporated. Unquestionably, the greatest shortcoming of the present research is that it will fail to make any difference.

## Chapter 9

### The Not So Hidden Agenda of Parental Choice

*(Another) problem authorities may face is that an unpopular school may be underused and in good modern accomodation while a popular school is in an unsatisfactory building. The question should then be asked whether the unpopular school should be closed and its building used for the popular school. (SED 1980 p6)*

Leaving aside the practical problems of Mr Fletcher's proposal (he was then Scottish Office minister responsible for education), it is clear that from its earliest incarnation (this quote is taken from the Consultative Paper issued some 18 months before the Act was passed), a prime thrust of parental choice was that good schools were popular and bad schools were unpopular, the logical extension of this being that bad schools should close. This notion was echoed by Sir Keith Joseph at the 1980 Conservative Party conference thus :

*A combination of vouchers and open enrolments would mean the disappearance of some of the least good state schools. (Glasgow Herald 8/10/80)*

Later in the same speech he went on to suggest that increased competition might :

*galvanise the less good state schools to achieve better results.*

thus clearly stating the criterion he felt to be crucial to good schools - good results. However each of the projects investigating parental choice have found little evidence for wide ranging use of examination results as

a means of comparison between schools. The evidence summarised in the previous chapter clearly indicates that to regard examination results as central to parental choice decisions reflects dogma rather than any evidence. Parental choice decisions have been shown to be founded in non-optimal strategies involving little by way of informed or rational choice.

While it would be wrong to suggest that there are no differences between schools, clearly there are effective and ineffective schools. Consider the following statement by a Headteacher :

*(X High School) pupils are receiving an education in insensitivity and unconcern towards others (Scotsman 9/8/84)*

and following, sets out a catalogue of accommodation, staff and other inadequacies. A clear case of a bad school ? Perhaps so, but the writer was rector of arguably one of the most popular, and thus "good" schools in Scotland. Later in the same article, three Headteachers of Community High Schools, also in Edinburgh, made the following points :

*Parents are choosing on other than educational grounds ..... the former selective schools or noted former senior secondary schools appear to be favoured while the former junior schools or schools in areas of deprivation are suffering. Other factors are at work, idle talk, vague rumours etc.*

This was a view repeated by one of the writers some months later :

*(Parental choice is) very damaging and sets schools back enormously. Views that schools are better than others are based on little more than old myths ..... leading to a rapid downward*

*spiral. The notion of parents of non-academic children judging schools by exam results is daft. (Scotsman 25/3/85)*

While the last of these points is unsupported by research evidence, each of the others receives substantial backing from all three studies of parental choice in Scotland. The Second Study demonstrated that, faced with the possibility of a closure at some stage in the future, some parents will pre-empt this administrative decision by opting to remove their children in advance. Similarly, several parents less familiar with the catchment area school who were nevertheless aware of movements out of the school suggested that they would have to question why these movements were taking place. The implication of this was that, if "just cause" were shown, they too would remove their children.

Each of the studies found that only a minority of parents chose for "academic" reasons or for reasons connected in any way to the curriculum. Petch, for example, in assessing the frequency of academic versus social (in the widest sense) justifications found overwhelmingly more of the latter (Petch, 1986). Further, the present research casts considerable doubts on the amount and quality of the information used by parents in arriving at these decisions.

*"The tragedy of course is that in many areas parents exercise choice for the wrong reasons... not being professional people themselves they fail to appreciate that in some comprehensive schools in our inner cities some schools are producing results that are better than we could have hoped given the nature of the catchment area that our school serves." (University of Glasgow, 1986)*

Such doubts are not new :

*How would a parent evaluate two schools - employment ? free school meals ? school uniforms ? exam results ? careers ? scholarships ? staffing ? sports ? culture ? I have said enough to make it clear that parents who are attempting to evaluate schools on rational grounds and not on hearsay and pure prejudice are going to have their work cut out (Scotsman 26/5/81)*

The writer was a past president of the Headteachers' Association of Scotland and then chairman of the (now closed) Hamilton College of Education, in an article predating the passing of the Education (Scotland) Act by five months. There seems little doubt that the present research has confirmed his worst fears. There is little evidence that parents have made any attempt to collect information in a systematic way to facilitate a full comparison between schools.

The Education (Scotland) Act 1981 lays considerable store by the necessity to publish information about the school system for parents. It will be recalled that some 20 pages of guidelines accompanied the SED circular on parental choice. Despite this, parents seem to have no wish to consume the information. The internal studies offer no evidence that choice is advised by the information sought, and while the University of Glasgow offer an indication that examination results were rated as "important" by many parents, the expressed reasons for choice elsewhere do not bear this out. The lack of such an information base and the unwillingness to use that which is internalised has a number of implications for the market model of parental choice.

### The Market Model of Parental Choice

*"I am also aware of terrible doubts about what information is for and what it is perceived to be for. I think the 1980 Act [in England] architects saw it as the means by which people made a choice of school. The whole context is very consumerist, in that the kind of information which LEAs and schools are required to give to parents is all designed to help them make a choice. The unspoken second sentence is to use choice as a weapon with which to influence schools - if you don't please me, I will take my choice away using the information which, in a sense, allows me to do this." (Sallis, 1986).*

Speaking in favour of his Consultative Paper, Mr Fletcher suggested that an exposure to market forces was no bad thing for a "nationalised industry". This thesis has permeated much of the work of right wing educationalists since Milton Friedman's first exposition of vouchers in 1953, and most clearly in the Black Papers and other IEA publications. (See e.g. Seldon 1986). The basic premise is that parents are in an ideal position to judge the worth of a school, and thus, given choice, would avoid "bad" schools and be attracted to "good" ones. According to degree, bad schools would thus be encouraged to "improve" or would close.

The classic model of market forces works best in areas where choice is substantially free and information levels are either high or not essential. Thus, given a choice of three brands of soap powder, it is likely that all are broadly interchangeable and the choice criterion would thus almost certainly be price. If a market can bear two brands to capacity given that each is available in all areas, then the third, the most expensive, will not sell. The choice facing the third brand is either to attempt to establish a different selling criteria, for example quality, (the unique selling

proposition) or meet the price of its competitors. If neither of these options is viable, the brand would be almost certain to close.

For the consumer, the consequences of this third alternative are negligible since the market can be satisfied by the two remaining brands (leaving aside costs to society of redundancy or knock on closures etc). This is not always the case. In the case of short-run, low-usage proprietary medicines, without state subsidy it is unlikely that their sales would be sufficient to be viable economically, even if two competing brands were introduced. The consequences of withdrawal of subsidy, essentially the removal of the "additional" market, would be low for society but high for those dependent on the drug.

The general principle involved is that of "externality". If a decision is made and it has consequences for someone else, it thus has externalities. In the case of soap powder, externalities are marginal and unimportant, in the case of the drug, they are central and crucial.

There are clearly externalities involved in parental choice. Collard (1972) identifies four types, of which two seem particularly relevant to parental choice. Collard's externalities rely on two classes, consumer and producer, and thus in general terms parents are consumers and the education system is producer. The collective decisions of parents when aggregated have consequences for the school system at a variety of levels. Firstly, at the level of individual schools, mass exit can affect the marginal viability of the school, particularly in conjunction with falling school rolls. Similarly, mass influx, as in the case of the school mentioned earlier in this

chapter, can lead to practical difficulties. In the former case even if closure is not at issue the number of courses on offer is likely to be diminished and the freedom to plan curricula correspondingly reduced. The Glasgow Study identified four problem areas for schools : teaching content, teaching methods, class size and ethos, involving respectively the ability to present a full curriculum, changes in non-traditional methods to appease parents opposed to them, problems caused by both larger and smaller classes and finally, changes in the social structure of the school in the face of the influx of disruptive pupils.

At authority level decisions on staffing, resource allocation - particularly in terms of buildings - and provision of education i.e. school closures are similarly circumscribed. These are consumer to producer externalities. In broad terms these are the externalities which formed the public agenda of parental choice as outlined by Mr Fletcher and Sir Keith Joseph in their speeches and considered by them to be "good", and opposed by educationalists, for example David Semple, Director of Education for Lothian. (SED 1980b)

The other class of externality which has rarely reached prominence in the parental choice debate is consumer to consumer. This is perhaps for two reasons. Firstly, the consequences of the externalities have been felt quite rarely - as yet few schools have closed in Scotland - and parents affected are likely to be among those least vocal and able to protest in an effective way, certainly far less so than the few affluent, middle class parents whose protests spurred Mr Fletcher into framing the legislation in the first instance. Nevertheless, the potential consequences of consumer to



consumer externalities should not be underestimated. The collective decisions of certain parents to exercise a choice cannot be viewed in isolation. The constraints applied to schools by parents' choices are no less relevant to individual children. Courses may not be available, staff will be in short supply, textbooks will be scarce. In extreme cases the school may close as a consequence of parental choice. The North Edinburgh Plan made great play of the importance of parental choice decisions in planning for the future of Ainslie Park and Drummond, two schools particularly badly affected by movements out through parental choice. Two of the six options presented by the Plan stated that either or both schools should close. Significantly, the only option explored to improve Ainslie Park was rejected since parental choice decisions were expected to override the Education Committee's recommendation.

Adler and Petch (1986), in presenting an overview of the operation of parental choice note that :

*In many areas the exercise of choice has imposed few, if any costs, but, in other areas, the costs have been quite considerable. In a few cases the exercise of choice by some parents has deprived others of the opportunity to send their child to their local school. Elsewhere, it has caused overcrowding ..... which has undoubtedly caused 'serious detriment' to other children. It has, likewise, resulted in some very undersubscribed schools. This is of particular concern at secondary level where curricular choices and educational opportunities at such schools may be seriously affected.*

As part of a number of experiments in parental choice, predating the Education Act 1980, Kent County Council (1978) set minimum admission levels for schools, and those which fell below these would not be supported, thus, in effect, closed. There is clear evidence in the Kent

study that an effect similar to the "downward spiral" mentioned by an Edinburgh headteacher (op cit) had the consequence of reinforcing the problems of schools under threat, by discouraging parents from initially allowing their children to attend, and, similarly, by encouraging those already there to leave.

Hirschman (1970) proposed there are two main options for almost any class of consumer placed in a situation of which they do not approve. The options centre around the option of staying within an organisation to attempt to affect change from within ("voice") or to leave the organisation either to sever links or to try to affect change from without ("exit"). Hirschman dealt with situations where 'exit' could be considered as perhaps a last resort. Adler and Raab (1988) make the point that, in terms of parental choice, "exit" has been made so simple that "voice" is unlikely to be considered as an option. (Evidence from the Glasgow study suggests that Headteachers may not listen anyway.) None of the parents interviewed for the present research made any mention of trying to change aspects of their catchment area school. In essence, if they did not like what they thought they saw, they did not consider it as an option and so chose another school.

It is doubtful whether voice would ever be considered by the majority of parents. Sallis (1986) in suggesting that parents were obsessive about choice, observed :

*It was partly because they knew that educational opportunity was unequal and that some peaceful mechanism had been found to share out what there was, and also because they felt that the choice of school was all important because this was the only way they could ever make an impact on their child's life chances.*

This suggests that some parents may choose because they feel they should, not because they perceive that they have to. This notion is supported to an extent by the present research in terms of the social and undifferentiated nature of perceived attractions and repulsions of schools. Similarly, both the Glasgow and Edinburgh studies noted the lack of specific educational information used in parental choice decisions.

As has been demonstrated quite clearly by all four research teams, the "quality" of decision making is low. Parents are singularly ill informed about their local schools and even more poorly informed about their chosen schools. The externalities of these decisions, as has also been demonstrated, can be great. Sallis (1986) further presents a case for accepting that among middle class, better educated parents, a higher quality of decision may be found, based rather more in assessment of the educational criteria. However it must also be accepted that the externalities of such decisions are markedly lower, since the schools involved are not likely to be high net losing schools, thus those not likely to produce inequality of provision as a consequence.

Thus, although in fact rights are apparently evenly distributed throughout the population, externalities, the consequences of these rights, are not. In effect, a group of parents, choosers, are given the right to make decisions with consequences for another group of parents, those electing to send their children to a school rejected by the first group. Parents making placing requests have the moral authority of the legislation to back their decisions, those who do not appear to be afforded little defence. This is

the paradox of parental choice - an apparent widening of the rights of one group may lead to the erosion of the rights of another.

Stillman and Maychell (1986) note that the :

*"whole purpose of being able to choose a school was to improve education at the local level. What needs to be asked is whether the progression from the concept of "choice for a few" (pre 1980) to "choice for all" (post 1980) could actually lead to improved education provision."*

In attempting to answer the question posed, they note also that true choice for all was still a long way off. Adler and Petch (1986) note unequivocally that the balance between the rights of the individual and the group in the form of the Education Authority have been tipped in favour of the individual at some cost to the group. This has led, they assert, to educational inequality. Clearly this is a consequence in line with the original thinking of Conservative politicians. Educational inequalities in the sense described by Adler and Petch (1986) and hinted at by Stillman and Maychell (1986) are unavoidable side effects of the market model of parental choice on which the legislation was founded (Sallis, 1986).

Fundamental to the market model is the assumption of informed rationality in parental choice decision making. The present research has extensively analysed such decision making. Little evidence was found to support such a premise. None of the other studies, conducted from non-psychological perspectives, offer much more towards the view that such a premise may be well-founded. It is clear that most, although clearly not all, parents are

ill-served to accept the role of informers of policy making envisaged for them by Conservative politicians. While the externalities of parental choice decisions have been relatively low thus far, the accelerating effects of declining birth rates will exacerbate the educational inequalities highlighted above. It is difficult to take issue with Sallis (1986) who observes :

*"choice is merely the polite way of saying that the longest arm can reach the highest shelf."*

Spomer (1987) in addressing the personal consequences of choice for one parent who chose a school on the basis of social perceptions offered the following observation :

*"She saw what happened as a form of social selection. While it dominates other considerations, schools both mirror and extend social divisions. Schools like Robin [high social status] will increasingly parody themselves and schools like Thrush [low social status] will find it harder to serve the interests of the neglected and deprived, because they will unduly dominate the school."*

There is little doubt that the real agenda of parental choice is the erosion of the discretion of local education authorities to plan and implement education policies. The Act itself was instrumental in removing many of the previous opportunities for LEAs to manage the provision of education in areas by, for example, restricting admissions and preserving rigid catchment area boundaries. Adler, Petch and Tweedle (1986) note that the few elements of control left to Authorities are subject to the discretion of Sheriffs in appeal hearings and that evidence thus far has not suggested that the Sheriffs are likely to uphold LEA policies without

question. There is little doubt that the quality of education available to children in parts of Scotland has suffered as a consequence of the imposition of parental choice. Adler, Petch and Tweedie (op cit) contend that severe inequalities in provision have arisen as a consequence of choice, both in terms of the effects of overcrowding and under enrolment.

Spooner offers a further observation :

*...the Government's emphasis on parental choice was a con trick. It had nothing to do with parent power and everything to do with stopping LEAs ridding the state sector of elitist education"*

The University of Glasgow study finds less evidence of this, perhaps as a consequence of the areas they chose to research, but also because of their scarcely disguised view that parental choice is essentially a good thing. Thus they chose to discard much of the evidence offered by headteachers of their concerns for school management because, they felt, these were merely hearsay. Their over-riding concern was for the administration of the educational system rather than for the quality of educational provision resulting.

The present research adds to the debate in reporting the concerns of parents trapped by the externalities of the decisions by others who typically have had no contact, nor willingness to have contact with their catchment area school Solsgirth. Their frustration is increased by the perception that their views are considered to be less worthwhile than those who they see to be choosing to opt for a school "better" in social status, choosing for simple snobbery. The consultation process on the proposed closure of Solsgirth was characterised by an inevitability which

was not eroded, perhaps only postponed, by the administrative decision to reprove the school. A public meeting between parents, education officials and local councillors consisted mainly of less articulate parents relying on passion alone to try to convince those whose response was dictated by, and rooted in, their perceptions of the veracity of the choices of others. As the present research has shown clearly, these perceptions are fundamentally flawed.

Stillman and Maychell's second book on parental choice is called "The Balancing Act" and Adler, Petch and Tweedle (1986) also call into question the balance of parental choice. Both refer to the need to set the rights of parents against the collective duty of the LEA in terms of the effective provision of education. In fact, the second of these is the embodiment of the rights of the majority of parents who wish to remain with their catchment area school, and whose wishes can be, in some cases, abrogated by the official sanction of submission to the views of a minority. It is difficult to derive any evidence from the present research, or from any of the external studies, which shows that a great number of parents are in any way qualified to make the kinds of balanced and informed decisions on educational provision expected of them both by the letter and the not so hidden agenda of the Act. If such decisions had consequences merely for the individual parent and child, then such reservations could perhaps be set aside in the present climate of libertarian choice. In the continuing struggle between the Government and LEAs, parents have been presented with a loaded gun. The immorality of this action is that little or no protection has been afforded to the potential casualties.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ACKROYD, S. and HUGHES, J.A. (1981) Data Collection in Context Longman, London
- ADLER, M.E. (1985) Gainers and Losers Unpublished paper, University of Edinburgh Parental Choice Workshop, March 1985
- ADLER, M.E. (1985) Falling Rolls and Rising Conflict Unpublished paper, Annual Conference of Scottish Educational Research Association, St Andrew's Univ, September 1985
- ADLER, M.E. and BONDI, E. (1986) To Close or not to Close? Unpublished paper, Institute of British Geographers, University of Manchester, September 1986
- ADLER, M.E. and BONDI, E. (1988) Delegation and Community Participation : An Alternative to the Problems Created by Falling School Rolls In Bondi, E. and Matthews, M.H. (eds) "Education and Society" [Read in Draft]
- ADLER, M.E., PETCH, A and TWEEDIE, J.W. (1986) Parental Choice in Education Final Report on ESRC Project no E00230036
- ADLER, M.E., PETCH, A. and TWEEDIE, J.W. (1986) The Origins and Impact of the Parents' Charter In McCrone (ed)
- ADLER, M.E. and RAAB, G.M. (1986) Survival of the Fittest Unpublished paper submitted to S.E.D.
- ADLER, M.E. and RAAB, G.M. (1986) Exploding Some Myths about the Uniqueness of Edinburgh Unpublished paper submitted to S.E.D.
- ADLER, M.E. and RAAB, G.M. (1986) A Tale of Two Cities Unpublished paper, Institute of British Geographers, University of Manchester, September 1986
- ADLER, M.E. and RAAB, G.M. (1988) Exit, Choice and Loyalty Draft unpublished paper
- ADLER, M.E. and TWEEDIE, J.W. (1986) Parental Choice : Liberty or Licence? Journal of the Law Society of Scotland August 1986 pp305-310
- ANASTASI, A. (1968) Psychological Testing McMillan, New York
- ANDERSON, D. (1982) Detecting Bad Schools Social Affairs Unit, London
- ARNOLD, H.J. and EVANS, M.G. (1979) Testing Multiplicative Models Does Not Require Ratio Scales OBHP, 24 41-59



- ARROW, K. (1952) Social Choice
- ATKINSON, G.B.J. (1983) The Economics of Education Hodder and Staughton, Sevenoakes
- ATHERTON, G. (1982) The Book of the School SCC, Glasgow
- BALDWIN, R.G. (1982) Freedom of Choice In Education American Education 18 17-23
- BEALES, A.C.F., BLAUGH, M., VEALE, D., WEST, E.G. and BOYSON, R. (1970) Education : A Framework for Choice IEA, London
- BEHLING, O. and STARKE, R.A. (1973) The Postulates of Expectancy Theory Ac. of Mgt. Journal 16 373-385
- BOSANQUET, N. (1983) After the New Right Heinemann, London
- BRAYBROOK, D. and LINDBLOM, C.E. (1963) A Strategy of Decision The Free Press, New York
- BROWN, J.A.C. (1961) Freud and the Post-Freudians Penguin, Harmondsworth
- BURGESS, R.G. (1982) Field Research Allen and Unwin, London
- BURGESS, R.G. (1984) In the Field Allen and Unwin, London
- BUROS, O.K. (1977) The Seventh Mental Measurements Yearbook Gryphon Press, Highland Park, N.J.
- BURTON, I., KATES, R.W. and WHITE, G.F. (1978) The Environment as Hazard OUP, New York
- CAMPBELL, D. and PRITCHARD, M. (1976) Motivation Theory In Industrial and Organisational Psychology In DUNNETTE, M.D. (ed)
- CARROLL, J.S. and PAYNE, J.W. (1976) Cognition and Social Behaviour Lawrence Earlbaum Ass., Potomac, Md.
- CONSERVATIVE PARTY (1974a) Firm Action for a Fair Britain Conservative Central Office, London.
- CONSERVATIVE PARTY (1974b) Putting Britain First Conservative Central Office, London
- COONS, J.E. and SUGARMAN, S.D. (1978) Education by Choice UCP, Berkely
- COX, C.B. and BOYSON, R. (1977) Black Paper 5 IEA, London
- CRONBACH, L.J. (1960) The Essentials of Psychological Testing Harper, New York

DE LEO, P.J. and PRITCHARD, R.D. (1974) An Examination of some Methodological Problems In Testing EV Models with Survey Techniques OBHP 12143-148

DENNISON, S (1984) Choice In Education IEA, London

DES (1965) The Organisation of Secondary Education (Circular 10/65) HMSO, London

DOUGLAS, J.W.B. (1964) The Home and the School Granada, St Albans

DOUGLAS, J.W.B., ROSS, J.M. and SIMPSON, H.R. (1968) All Our Future Granada, London

DUNNETTE, M.D. (1976) Handbook of Industrial and Organisational Psychology Rand-McNally, Chicago Ill.

EDUCATION (PARENTS' CHARTER) BILL (1975) HMSO, London

EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) (No.2) BILL (1980) HMSO, London

EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) ACT (1981) HMSO, London

EDUCATION ACT (1944) HMSO, London

EDWARDES, W. (1954) A Theory of Decision Making PB 51 380-417

ELLIOT, J. (1981) The Cambridge Accountability Project Cam. Inst. of Ed., Cambridge

ELLIOT, J., BRIDGES, D., GIBSON, R. and NIAS, J. (1981) School Accountability Grant MacIntyre, London

EYSENCK, H.J. (1971) Readings In Extraversion and Introversion Staples Press, London

FEATHER, N. (1982) Expectations and Action Lawrence Earlbaum Ass., Hillsdale, N.J.

FESTINGER, L. (1957) A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance Row, Peterson and co., New York

FISCHOFF, B., LICHTENSTEIN, S., SLOVIK, P., DERBY, S.L. and KEARNEY, R.L. (1981) Acceptable Risk CUP, Cambridge

FISCHOFF, B., SLOVIK, P. and LICHTENSTEIN, S. (1977) Knowing with Certainty Journal of Experimental Psychology 3552-564

FISCHOFF, B., GOTEIN, A. and SHAPIRA, H. (1982) Subjective Expected Utility Theory In Feather (ed)

FISHBEIN, M and AZJEN, F. (1975) Beliefs, Attitudes, Intentions and Behaviour Addison-Wesley, London

- FRIEDMAN, M. and FRIEDMAN, R. (1981) Free to Choose Avon, New York
- GAVIN, J.F. (1970) Ability, Effort and Role Perception as Antecedents of Job Performance Experimental Publication System 5, Manuscript No. 190a, 1-26
- GOODE, W.J. and HATT, P.K. (1952) Methods In Social Research McGraw-Hill, New York
- GRAEN, G. (1969) Instrumentality Theory of Work Motivation J. of App Psy. Monograph 53 (2 Pt 2)
- GRAHAM, H.A. (1974) Human Resources Management Macdonald and Evans, Plymouth
- GRAY, J., McPHERSON, A.F and RAAFE, D. (1983) Reconstructions of Secondary Education RKP, London
- HACKMAN, J. and PORTER, L. (1968) Expectancy Theory Predictions of Work Effectiveness OBHP 3 417-426
- HEARST, D. (1981) Education Act 'A Big Breakthrough' Scotsman 10/11/81 p9
- HERRIOT, P. and ECOB, R. (1979) Occupational Choice and EV Theory JOP 52 311-324
- HERRIOT, P., ECOB, R. and HUTCHISON, M. (1980) Decision Theory and Occupational Choice JOP 53 223-246
- HERZBERG, F., MAUSNER, B. and SNYDERMAN, B. (1959) Motivation to Work Wiley, New York
- HIRSCHMANN, A.O. (1970) Exit, Voice and Loyalty Harvard UP, Cambridge, Mass.
- HIRSCHMANN, A.O. (1974) Exit, Voice and Loyalty : Further Reflections Social Science Information 3 7-26
- HOUSE, R. (1971) A Path-Goal Theory of Leader Effectiveness ASQ 16 321-338
- ILGEN, D.R., NEBEKER, D.M. and PRITCHARD, R.D. (1981) Expectancy Theory Measures OBHP, 28 189-223
- JOHNSON, D. and RANSOM, E. (1983) Family and School Choice Croom Helm, New York
- JOSEPH, K. (1982) Address to the 99th Conservative Party Conference (In Education, 8.12.82. p265)
- KAHNEMANN, D. and TVERSKY, A. (1973) On the Psychology of Prediction Psychological Review, 80 237-251

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL (1978) Education Vouchers In Kent Kent C.C., Maidstone

KERR, S.A. (1981) Expectancy Theory : The Prediction of Welfare Benefit Claiming Behaviour Incorporating Moderator Variables, Draft unpublished paper, University of Edinburgh

KERR, S.A. (1982) Final Report Report to DHSS, University of Edinburgh

KLEIN, N.M. (1983) Utility and Decision Strategies OBHP, 31 1-28

KUHNREUTHER, H., GINSBERG, R., MILLER, L., SAGI, P., BORKIN, B. and KATZ, N. (1978) Disaster Insurance Protection : Public Policy Lessons Wiley, New York

LANDY, F. and TRUMBO, D. (1980) Psychology of Work Behaviour Dorsey Press, Homewood, Ill

LAWLER, E.E. (1973) Motivation In Work Organisations Brookes/Cole, Monterey, Cal

LAWLER, E.E. and PORTER, L.W. (1967) Antecedent Attitudes of Effective Managerial Performance OBHP 2 122-142

LELLO, J. Ed. (1979) Accountability In Education Ward Lock Educational, London

LEON, F. (1979) Number and Outcomes and Accuracy of Prediction In Expectancy Research OBHP 23 251-267

LEWIN, K. (1935) A Dynamic Theory of Personality McGraw Hill, New York

MCCORMICK, R. (1982) Calling Education to Account Heinemann, London

MCCRONE, D. Ed. (1987) Scottish Government Yearbook 1987 EUP, Edinburgh

MCGREGOR, D. (1960) The Human Side of the Enterprise McGraw-Hill, New York

MCPHERSON, A.F. and RAAB, C. (1987) The Making of Scottish educational Policy EUP, Edinburgh

MAO TSETUNG (1936) Problems of Strategy In China's Revolutionary War from *Selected Works* Vol. 1 p188

MASLOW, A.H. (1954) Motivation and Personality Harper, New York

MAYNARD, A. (1975) Experiment with Choice In Education IEA, London

MILL, J.S. (1962) Utilitarianism Bantam, New York

MILLER, G.A. (1956) The Magical Number 7  $\pm$  2 In PR 63 81-97

- MITCHELL, T.R. (1974) Expectancy Models of Job Satisfaction, Occupational Preference and Effort In PB 81 1053-1077
- MITCHELL, T.R. and BEACH, L.- R. (1976) A Review of Occupational Preference and Choice Research In JOP 49 231-248
- MITCHELL, T.R. (1982) Expectancy - Value Models In Organisational Psychology In FEATHER 1982
- MUCHINSKY, P.M. (1977) A Comparison of Within and Across Subjects Analyses of the Expectancy - Valence Model for Predicting Effort In Ac. of Mgt. Journal 20 154-158
- MURRELL, H. (1976) Motivation at Work Methuen, London
- PARKER, D. and DYER, L.A. (1976) Expectancy Theory as a Within-Persons Behavioural Choice Model OBHP, 17 97-117
- PAYNE, J.W. (1980) Information Processing Theory In WALLSTEN ed.
- PECOTITCH, A. and CHURCHILL, G.A. (1981) An Examination of the Anticipated - Satisfaction Importance Valence Controversy OBHP 27 213-227
- PETCH, A. J. (1986) Rezoning : An Exercise In Compromise Unpublished Paper, University of Edinburgh
- PETCH, A. J. (1986) Parental Choice at Entry to Primary School Research Papers In Education Vol. 1 pp 26-47
- PETCH, A. J. (1986) Parents' Reasons for Choosing Secondary Schools In STILLMAN ed.
- PETERS, L. E. (1977) Cognitive Models of Motivation OBHP 20 129-148
- PHELPS, R. H. and SHANTEAU, J. (1978) Livestock Judges OBHP 21 209-219
- PORTER, L. W. and LAWLER, E. E. (1968) Managerial Attitudes and Performance Irwin-Dorsey, Homewood, Ill.
- ROETHLISBERGER, F.J. and DIXON, W.J. (1939) Management and the Worker Harvard UP, Cambridge, Mass.
- SCHMIDT, F. L. (1975) Implications of a Measurement Problem OBHP 10 243-251
- SCHMIDT, N. and SON, L. (1981) An Evaluation of Valence Models of Motivation OBHP, 27 135-150
- SCHWAB, D., OLIAN\_GOTTLIEB, J. and HENEMAN, H. (1979) Between Subjects Expectancy Theory Research PB 86 139-147
- SCOTTISH CONSUMER COUNCIL (1980) A Charter for Parents : The SCC's Reply SCC, Glasgow

- SCOTTISH CONSUMER COUNCIL (1981) Information for Parents SCC, Glasgow
- SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1947) Secondary Education : A Report of the Advisory Council on Education In Scotland Cmd 7005, Edinburgh
- SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1951) Secondary Education : The Report of the Advisory Council Circular 206, Edinburgh
- SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1965) Reorganisation of Secondary Education on Comprehensive Lines Circular 600, HMSO, Edinburgh
- SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1980) Admission to Schools - A Charter for Parents 1 of 4, HMSO, Edinburgh
- SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1980a) Choice Compulsion and Cost HMSO, Edinburgh
- SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1983, 1984 and 1986) Statistical Bulletin HMSO, Edinburgh
- SELDON, A. (1986) Vouchers In Education IEA, London
- SIMON, H. A. (1955) A Behavioural Model of Rational Choice QJE 69 99-118
- SIMON, H. A. (1957a) Administrative Behaviour McMillan, New York
- SIMON, H. A. (1957b) Models of Man Wiley, New York
- SIMON, H. A. (1982) Models of Bounded Rationality MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- SIMON, H.A. (1983) Reason In Human Affairs OUP, Oxford
- SLOVIC, P., LICHTENSTEIN, S and FISCHOFF, B. (1976) Cognitive Processes and Societal Risk Taking In CARROLL and PAYNE (eds.)
- SLOVIC, P., FISCHOFF, B. and LICHTENSTEIN, S. (1977) Behavioural Decision Theory Ann. Rev. of Psy. 28 1-39
- STACEY, M. (1969) Methods of Social Research Pergamon Press, Oxford
- STAHL, M.J. and HARRELL, A.M. (1981) Modelling Effort Decisions OBHP 27 303-325
- STILLMAN, A. (1986) The Balancing Act of 1980 NFER, Slough
- STILLMAN, A. and MAYCHELL, K. (1986) Choosing Schools NFER, Windsor
- St JOHN STEVAS, N. (1974) Standards and Freedom Conservative Political Centre, London
- SVENSON, O. (1979) Process Descriptions of Decision Making OBHP 23 86-112

- TAYLOR, F.W. (1947) Scientific Management Harper, New York
- TIMES EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT (SCOTLAND) (1980) "Fletcher Unveils the New Spirit 7/3/80 p1
- TOLMAN, E. (1932) Purposive Behaviour In Animals and Man Century, New York
- TVERSKY, A. (1969) Intransitivity of Preference Psy. Rev. 76 31-48
- TVERSKY, A. (1972) Elimination by Aspects Psy. Rev. 79 281-299
- TVERSKY, A and KAHNEMAN, D. (1971) The Belief In the Law of Small Numbers PB 76 105-110
- TVERSKY, A. and KAHNEMAN, D. (1973) Availability Cognitive Psy. 5 207-232
- TVERSKY, A. and KAHNEMAN, D. (1974) Judgement Under Uncertainty Science 185 1124-1131
- TVERSKY, A. and KAHNEMAN, D. (1981) The Forming of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice Science 211 453-458
- TWEEDIE, J.W. (1986) Parental Choice In a Scottish Region University of Edinburgh, Unpublished
- TWEEDIE, J. W. (1986a) Parental Choice of School : Legislating the Balance In STILLMAN (ed)
- TWEEDIE, J. W. (1986b) Rights In Social Programmes : The Case of Parental Choice of School Public Law, Autumn 1986, 407-436
- UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW (1986) Parental Choice of School In Scotland University of Glasgow, Glasgow
- VROOM, V. H. (1964) Work and Motivation Wiley, New York
- VROOM, V. H. and DECI, E. (1970) Management and Motivation Harmondsworth
- WAHBA, M. and HOUSE, R. (1974) Expectancy Theory In Work and Motivation Human Relations 27 121-147
- WALLSTEN, T. S. ed. (1980) Cognitive Processes In Choice and Decision Behaviour Lawrence Earlbaum Ass., Hillsdale, N. J.
- WYER, R.S. (1974) Cognitive Organisation and Change Lawrence Earlbaum Ass., Potomac, Md.
- ZAGORSKI, M. A. (1975) Risky Decisions Acta Psychologica 39 487-494



### Supplementary Bibliography

BURGESS, R.G. (1984) In The Field G. Allan and Unwin, London

COX, C., BALCHIN, N. and MARKS, J. (1989) How to Choose a State School Pan Books, London

DENZIN, N.K. (1970) In DENZIN, N.K. (ed) Sociological Methods : A Sourcebook Aldin, Chicago

KANE, E. (1984) Doing Your Own Research Marlon Boyars, London

MOSER, C. and KALTON, G. (1965) Survey Methods In Social Investigation Heinemann, London

SHIPMAN, M. (1981) Limitations of Sociological Research Longman, London

SILVERMAN, D. (1985) Qualitative Methodology and Sociology Cower, Aldershot



## Appendix 1

### The Brochures

These comments relate to brochures published over three academic years, namely 1983-85.

Lothian Region decided initially that an identical format should be used for each brochure. This was A4, either bound or insert, the cover being white with a green band highlighting the name of the school. Each booklet carried the words "Information for Parents". The reasoning behind this standardisation was probably to prevent some schools spending markedly more on their brochures than others. Photography and cover illustration were also barred (although Shildmains seemed to breach this guideline). Since then, however, both of these guidelines have been dropped.

Apart from statutory requirements, the schools have a measure of discretion as to the content of their brochures. This was reflected in the differences in size and scope. Brochure size ranged from 20 pages (Lady Nina) to 100 pages (Monktonhall). The presentation of brochures was generally unimaginative but clear, poor reproduction excepted, and easy to read. Most seemed to have been produced by micro - computer.

Turning to the presentation of examination results, certain worrying factors emerged. The EIS among others had expressed concern that results would not be presented in a standard way, and this fear was certainly

borne out by this sample of 13 Lothian Region brochures. Ideally parents should be given some indication of the meaning of the examinations figures, such as what each pass represents, the numbers presented for each exam, the school policy on exam presentations, and (helpfully) some running totals of passes. In fact only Monktonhall did this (although they included no indication of numbers of presentations). Their brochure contained a detailed introduction to the examination system and a statement to parents by the headteacher cautioning them that exam results are but a part of the curriculum. (It was welcome that at a school such as this, at which the charge of "having something to hide academically" could not be levelled should say such things). Their table was clear and in a suitably large type face.

At the other end of the scale, Knochshinnock, for example, offered a table which was difficult to read, and had no presentation or pass totals. Their justification for exam presentations policy was contained in the body of the text, well separated from the table. Few of the results tables were well presented. The best (Polmalse and Sheriffyards) were large with columns and rows which were easy to follow. The poorest (Lady Nina and Shieldmains) were almost incomprehensible.

Solsgrith chose to present the results in a table which accentuated the lack of academic success by including a vast array of "0"s representing mostly no presentations rather than failures.

In most other aspects of content, there was little to differentiate between the brochures of the thirteen schools. None had adopted any imaginative

Innovations in content or presentation and varied only in the amount of depth they included. Some brochures were more "chatty" than others, but there was little in the way of comment or attempts to sell the school. Most exhaustive was Monktonhall. Each section was introduced by the Headteacher, and included details of many extra-curricular activities, a full staff list and (given the origins of a large number of Monktonhall' parents) a useful summary of the differences between Scottish and English education systems.

To summarise briefly, the sample of brochures was essentially anodyne, giving little beyond simple factual information with a matter of fact presentation style. Examination results were not uniformly presented and several of the schools' tables seemed to lack even the basic information required by parents to make the sort of informed judgements envisaged by the legislators.

## Appendix 2 : The Second Study Questionnaire

### Section 1 : General Questions

- 1.1 How many children have you ?
- 1.2 At what stage(s) are they ?
- 1.3 At what age(s) did you finish your secondary education ?
- 1.4 What sort of school did you attend ? Where ?
- 1.5 Have you had any form of further education ? If so, what kind ?
- 1.6 Have you gained any formal qualifications ? Can you detail them ?
- 1.7 How long have you lived in this house ?
- 1.8 How long have you lived locally ?
- 1.9 Do you rent your house ?
- 1.10 Do you think it is likely that you will move in the next year ?
- 1.11 What is your occupation ?
- 1.12 Who would you say is responsible for the major decisions in the children's education ?
- 1.13 Is there anything which would prevent either of you from taking an active part in the decision making ?
- 1.14 How often do you discuss the children's education with (a) each other (b) your children (c) teachers (d) others ?

### Section 2 : The Role of Others in Information

We have just talked about discussing education with various people. A major part of this is gathering information about schools. Are there any people, or documents, or books that you consult to find out things about schools ? I have here a checklist including some of the sources you have mentioned along with some mentioned by other parents. Using this card [rated 1-5], would you assess how important each is to you as a source of information about schools ? Now I would like you to go through the list again with this second card, [very often - never] and try to estimate how much use you have made of each source in the last few months.

The secondary schools information booklets

Open days/meetings for parents

Other parents

Older children of your own

Your primary 7 child

Primary school staff

Secondary school staff

Others who are not parents

Anyone else ?

- 2.1 Have you discussed the choice of school for your child with anyone ?  
Who ?
- 2.2 Do you think parents round here discuss it much ?
- 2.3 Have you received any printed information about your child's assigned school ?
- 2.4 Do you know that you can ask for information about other schools ?
- 2.5 Have you asked for any other written information about schools in the area ?
- 2.6 Are there things you feel it important for a school to have to be a good school for your children ? Similarly, are there things you think a good school for your children should not have ?
- 2.7 What things do you think are important that your child gets from his or her education or from being at school ?
- 2.8 I have a list of some other parents' ideas as well as your own. I would like you to go through this list and assess how important you feel each one is.
- 2.9 I would like you to go through the list again, firstly identifying the one which is most important to you. I would then like you to choose the five most important.

Good buildings

Wide range of subjects

Strong discipline

Communicates with parents

Has a secure future

Out of school activities

Close to home

Good teachers

Friends also attend

Classrooms are happy

Good exam prospects

Good job prospects

Good preparation for work

Gain social skills

Help with education problems

Section 3 : Instrumentalities

- 3.1 Which school is your child assigned to for next year ?
- 3.2 Have you been officially informed of this ?
- 3.3 Can you tell me the names of the other local secondary schools ?
- 3.4 What sort of reputation would you say each has around here ?
- 3.5 You said earlier that you had gone to school in Edinburgh. Of the local schools that were open then, what sort of reputation did they have at that time ?
- 3.6 We have talked a little about things you think are important. I would like you to estimate how true it would be of each of the schools to say that they had the things you thought were important.

Section 4 : Specific Questions

- 4.1 What is it about Ainslie Park that makes you dis/satisfied ?
- 4.2 How dis/satisfied would you say you were ? (rating 1-5)
- 4.3 Do you know of any of the local schools gaining or losing pupils in the last year ?
- 4.4 What is it about each that has led to this, do you think ?
- 4.5 Do you know of anyone sending their children elsewhere ?
- 4.6 Who and where ?
- 4.7 Why do you think they did this ?
- 4.8 Have you thought about sending your children to any other school ?
- 4.9 Can you tell me how you would go about doing this ?
- 4.10 Do you know of any restrictions ?
- 4.11 Do you think it is something parents ought to be able to do ?
- 4.12 If not, then who should have the power ?
- 4.13 Have you ever thought about sending your child to a fee paying school ?
- 4.14 Assuming you had the means, would this still be the case ?
- 4.15 Is it important for you that your child goes to the school of your choice ?

4.16 How likely is it that you will make a placing request [1-5] ?

4.17 Which school would you choose ?

4.18 Either : Why would you do this ? or : Why have you decided to stay with Ainslie Park ?

4.19 Do you think such a request (if made) would succeed ?

4.20 Do you think a request for any of the other schools would succeed ?



1 You currently have a child in Primary 6. In a few months you will be given the chance to decide which secondary school you would like your child to go to. Have you thought much about this decision?

Please tick one of the boxes

A great deal	
Quite a lot	
A little	
Not at all	

2 Have you ever asked for any of your children to be sent to a school other than their local one?

Please tick one of the boxes.

No	
Yes	

If you answered NO please go to question 3.

If you have, please write in the names of the schools involved, and briefly explain your reasons for the move.

From \_\_\_\_\_ To \_\_\_\_\_

Reasons \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Year of request - 19\_\_

From \_\_\_\_\_ To \_\_\_\_\_

Reasons \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Year of request - 19\_\_

Was your request granted in each case?

Please tick one of the boxes

No	
Yes	

No	
Yes	

3 Many different factors go to make up a child's education. Not all of these will matter to you to the same extent. Opposite each of these aspects of "education" please write in the number which corresponds to how much it matters to you.

1 = This is one of the most important things in schools

2 = This matters, but is not vital

3 = Irrelevant, or not at all important

4 = I don't want this in a school

School has good buildings and facilities	
School has good, well qualified staff	
School encourages parents to visit	
Pupils are well behaved in, and out, of school	
School insists on uniforms being worn	
Staff may dress casually	
School has high academic standards	
School offers a wide range of subjects	
Pupils are encouraged to help in their community	
School is close to home	
School is one site, without huts and annexes	
Pupils are on familiar terms with their teachers	
School emphasises the "3 r's" above all else	
School offers religious / moral education	
School has good sports facilities	
School has small classes at all stages	
Pupils have strong respect for staff	
School does not focus exclusively on preparing for exams	
School has a good, happy atmosphere	

4 Is there anything to do with education and schools you feel is "most important" but which has not been included here? If there is / are, please briefly describe it / them in the space below.

---



---



---



---



---

5 Do you think there are differences between schools generally in any of the following?

Place a tick in the appropriate box.

	a lot	some	none
Range of subjects offered			
Ways in which they are taught			
Standards of behaviour			
Academic standards			
Willingness to communicate with parents			
Standard of teachers			
Buildings and facilities			

6 Are there any other areas in which you think schools differ which have not been included here? If so, please write them in in the space below.

---



---



---



---



---

7 Here is an "imaginary report card" on your catchment area school, Ainslie Park. Using the grades listed below, fill in the letter which corresponds to how you think the school performs in each of these areas. If you are not sure about any, leave them blank.

- A = Excellent
- B = Very Good
- C = Fair
- D = Not So Good
- E = Poor

**REPORT - AINSLIE PARK HIGH SCHOOL**

School has good buildings and facilities	
School has good, well qualified staff	
School encourages parents to visit	
Pupils are well behaved in, and out, of school	
School insists on uniforms being worn	
Staff may dress casually	
School has high academic standards	
School offers a wide range of subjects	
Pupils are encouraged to help in their community	
School is close to home	
School is one site, without huts and annexes	
Pupils are on familiar terms with their teachers	
School emphasises the "3 r's" above all else	
School offers religious / moral education	
School has good sports facilities	
School has small classes at all stages	
Pupils have strong respect for staff	
School does not focus exclusively on preparing for exams	
School has a good, happy atmosphere	

Copy in those you added in question 4 and grade these as well


8 You currently have a child in Primary 6. Which schools would you consider sending him / her to? Please write their names in the spaces below.

Name of school \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school \_\_\_\_\_

On the next few sheets are copies of the same report card as you used to grade you catchment area school. For each school you have mentioned in the first part of this question, please fill in the report card for that school in the same way. Remember to write in the name of the school at the top.

language:

Now my saying shall be my undoing,

And every stone I wind off like a reel-

The closing lines convey a splendidly ambiguous image of the self-contradiction which is implicit in the task the poet has taken on: the price of giving words their "real life" back might be his standing apart from his own, cutting himself out of history and "undoing" himself, paradoxically, in the innocence of his wordy Eden -

Edinburgh, 16th August 1990

franca delarosa

\* \* \*

## NOTES

- (1) This is not meant to be a full-length, line-by-line analysis: the sound patterns, for instance, have not been considered, and would deserve a closer analysis.
- (2) "In my craft or sullen art", in Collected Poems (1952), ed by W. Davies and R. Maud, London, Dent 1988, p. 106.
- (3) "Answers to an Enquiry", New Verse, Oct. 1934, pp 8-9, <sup>in</sup> John Wain, "Druid of Her Broken Body", D.T. New Critical Essays, ed by W. Davies, London, Dent 1977, pp 14-
- (4) Michel Leiris, La règle du jeu I: Biffures, Paris, Gallimard 1948, pp. 56-57.
- (5) ← Jan Mukařovský, "Standard language and poetic language" in Paul L. Garvin (ed.), A Prague School Reader Washington D.C., Georgetown U.P. 1964, in Antony Easthope, Poetry as Discourse, London, Methuen 1983.
- (6) Dylan Thomas, Collected Poems, cit., p. 74.
- (5) → (7) "La seule chose évidente est que (...) lettres et mots ont pris sagement leur place dans le rang et sont devenus pour moi, ou peu s'en faut, 'lettres montées', après avoir été ressorts cabalistiques d'illumination." ibid., p. 76.
- (8) Antony Easthope, cit. - In the context of this reading, the first chapter of this essay, "Discourse as Language" is particularly interesting.
- (9) "Shut, too, in a tower of words / mark / On the horizon walking like the trees / the wordy shapes of / moment" "Esprit: 100. The H. D. Poems" Collected Poems, cit. 10

- A = Excellent  
 B = Very Good  
 C = Fair  
 D = Not So Good  
 E = Poor

REPORT - \_\_\_\_\_ SCHOOL

School has good buildings and facilities	
School has good, well qualified staff	
School encourages parents to visit	
Pupils are well behaved in, and out, of school	
School insists on uniforms being worn	
Staff may dress casually	
School has high academic standards	
School offers a wide range of subjects	
Pupils are encouraged to help in their community	
School is close to home	
School is one site, without huts and annexes	
Pupils are on familiar terms with their teachers	
School emphasises the "3 r's" above all else	
School offers religious / moral education	
School has good sports facilities	
School has small classes at all stages	
Pupils have strong respect for staff	
School does not focus exclusively on preparing for exams	
School has a good, happy atmosphere	

Copy in those you added in question 4 and grade these as well




- A = Excellent  
 B = Very Good  
 C = Fair  
 D = Not So Good  
 E = Poor

REPORT - \_\_\_\_\_ SCHOOL

School has good buildings and facilities	
School has good, well qualified staff	
School encourages parents to visit	
Pupils are well behaved in, and out, of school	
School insists on uniforms being worn	
Staff may dress casually	
School has high academic standards	
School offers a wide range of subjects	
Pupils are encouraged to help in their community	
School is close to home	
School is one site, without huts and annexes	
Pupils are on familiar terms with their teachers	
School emphasises the "3 r's" above all else	
School offers religious / moral education	
School has good sports facilities	
School has small classes at all stages	
Pupils have strong respect for staff	
School does not focus exclusively on preparing for exams	
School has a good, happy atmosphere	

Copy in those you added in question 4 and grade these as well




- A = Excellent  
 B = Very Good  
 C = Fair  
 D = Not So Good  
 E = Poor

REPORT - \_\_\_\_\_ SCHOOL

School has good buildings and facilities	
School has good, well qualified staff	
School encourages parents to visit	
Pupils are well behaved in, and out, of school	
School insists on uniforms being worn	
Staff may dress casually	
School has high academic standards	
School offers a wide range of subjects	
Pupils are encouraged to help in their community	
School is close to home	
School is one site, without huts and annexes	
Pupils are on familiar terms with their teachers	
School emphasises the "3 r's" above all else	
School offers religious / moral education	
School has good sports facilities	
School has small classes at all stages	
Pupils have strong respect for staff	
School does not focus exclusively on preparing for exams	
School has a good, happy atmosphere	

Copy in those you added in question 4 and grade these as well


- A = Excellent  
 B = Very Good  
 C = Fair  
 D = Not So Good  
 E = Poor

REPORT - \_\_\_\_\_ SCHOOL

School has good buildings and facilities	
School has good, well qualified staff	
School encourages parents to visit	
Pupils are well behaved in, and out, of school	
School insists on uniforms being worn	
Staff may dress casually	
School has high academic standards	
School offers a wide range of subjects	
Pupils are encouraged to help in their community	
School is close to home	
School is one site, without huts and annexes	
Pupils are on familiar terms with their teachers	
School emphasises the "3 r's" above all else	
School offers religious / moral education	
School has good sports facilities	
School has small classes at all stages	
Pupils have strong respect for staff	
School does not focus exclusively on preparing for exams	
School has a good, happy atmosphere	

Copy in those you added in question 4 and grade these as well


9 Do you, as a parent, have much contact with any of the schools locally? What sorts of contact do you have?

Please tick whichever boxes apply to you

Name of school \_\_\_\_\_

I usually attend/ take part in-

Parents nights	
Social functions	
Adult classes	
School plays etc	
Parents association / PTA	
Sports days / Matches	

Special involvement \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

NONE OF THESE ☐

1

Name of school \_\_\_\_\_

I usually attend / take part in-

Parents nights	
Social functions	
Adult classes	
School plays etc	
Parents association / PTA	
Sports days / matches	

Special involvement \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

NONE OF THESE ☐

10 You currently have a child in Primary 6. Which school would you like your child to attend from August 1985?

Name of school \_\_\_\_\_

Is this your local catchment area school

Please tick one of the boxes

No	
Yes	

Why would you like your child to attend this school rather than any of the others?

Please give your reasons in the space below

11 Are there any reasons why your child might not start this school in August 1985?

Please tick any boxes which apply to you

Moving away from the area	
School may close down in the meantime	
The school may be full	
Your request (if you make one) will not be granted	
Child will attend a private / independent school	

Any other specific reasons?

---

---

---

12 Bearing these things in mind, how likely is it that your child will start at the school you mentioned in question 10 from August 1985?

Please tick one box

Certainly will	
Probably will	
May or may not	
Probably will not	
Certainly will not	

13 Who do you think should have the final say in which school a child attends?

Please tick one of the boxes

Parent or child alone	
School alone	
Education Authority alone	
Parent / child and the school together	
Parent / child and the Education Authority together	

Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

14 If you have any comments to make regarding your local schools, or about education in general, it would be helpful if you could write them in the space below. Remember that the school will not be told of your responses.